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ETHIOPIA

St. George, Patron Saint of Ethiopia. A characteristic representation in which St. George, complete with crown, is rescuing someone in distress. His great popularity is illustrated by the inclusion of his portrait in a copy of the Holy Scriptures (1476-1477). Not only is he patron of the largest church in Addis Ababa, but his effigy appears on the Imperial diadems. The origins of his patronage are obscure; but his advent somewhere about the fourteenth century seems to be linked with the spread of Coptic literature by way of the Egyptian convent of St. Anthony. The first compilation of the Miracles of the saint dates from the reign of Zara-Yaqob, 1434-1468, and by the end of that century had developed into a collection which amounted to nearly eighty epic accounts. For the most part they were translations from Coptic-Arabic originals; these are thought to have been written not long before, for some of the people concerned were Moslems whom the saint had either chastised or converted, and moreover there is mention of a famous hermit from the region of Cairo, called Barsauma-the-naked, who died in about 1517. Some episodes are linked with churches of Middle Egypt, and particularly with the great pilgrimage of St. George to Beba, a short distance to the south of the Fayum. But these texts were very thoroughly absorbed by the Ethiopian translators into their own literature, some of the episodes being extended to take place within Ethiopia, with additional tales of miracles worked by St. George for the Emperor Zara-Yaqob and the monastery Debra-Lihanos of Shoa. These later elements make it possible to be more exact as to when and where this voluminous work was written; it was the outcome of a vast fusion of literature produced at a time of intense activity in Ethiopian convents of the Middle Ages. Among the great works that contributed to this literary stream may be counted the much-cherished *Synaxaire*, a compendium of the lives of countless saints, and the rich collection of the *Miracles of Mary*, with its vivid text and abundance of novel illustrations. The latter work, composed in a Tigre convent, illustrates how the Ethiopian illuminators imposed their own decorative medium on the examples that reached them from Egypt and in some cases Syria. The warrior saints certainly had a venerable aspect! Martyred for their faith, they rode with sword or lance in hand, cloak flying out behind. This figure of the hero who is victorious over paganism and defeats the devil goes back to the time of the persecution. It began in obscurity, with none of the emblems accumulated in the course of the centuries. It came to assume in effect an appearance devoid of all religious significance, in the shape of the effigies formerly carved on the funerary stelae of so many of the Roman legionaries and found from the Rhine to the East: riders at the gallop transfixing a last enemy. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



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ETHIOPIA

JEAN DORESSE

Director of Archaeological Research in Ethiopia

28383

Translated from the French by

ELSA COULT



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
I <i>Ethiopia in Antiquity</i>	13
II <i>Ethiopia in the Early Christian and Byzantine Era</i>	62
III <i>From the Seventh to the Twelfth Century: History in Shadow</i>	90
IV <i>The Zagwe Dynasty and the Churches of Lalibela</i>	93
V <i>The Mediaeval Period</i>	115
VI <i>The Struggle with Islam</i>	124
VII <i>The Renaissance in Ethiopia</i>	155
VIII <i>The Gondar Period</i>	178
IX <i>Palaces—Gardens—Abbeys</i>	186
X <i>The Age of the 'Judges'</i>	192
XI <i>Theodore</i>	198
XII <i>Contemporary Ethiopia</i>	201
XIII <i>Churches—Monasteries—Manuscripts</i>	205
XIV <i>The Way of the People</i>	222
BIBLIOGRAPHY	233
INDEX	235

Note. The lines quoted on pp. 20, 57, and 60 are from *The Eighth Book of al-Iklil* by Ibn-al-Ha'ik al-Hamdani, concerning the History of the Castles, Cities and Inscriptions of Himyar, and are translated by Nabih Amin Faris, Princeton Oriental Texts, Volume III.

All other quotations are rendered by the translator of this book.

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In presenting this work I am deeply indebted to His Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia. Although the book is essentially non-academic in its approach it owes a very great deal to the two years I was able to devote to scientific investigation under the auspices of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, and I shall always be grateful for the lively interest shown by His Majesty in guiding our early archaeological researches and providing the necessary facilities for carrying out the work. I should also like to take this opportunity of thanking all those—whom space unfortunately does not permit me to mention by name—whose task it was to help us during this period; they too, by going to endless trouble on our behalf, made it possible to accomplish the exploration and excavations essential to our mission, as well as the more personal research which to no small extent has inspired this book.

J.D.

INTRODUCTION

... There, the sacred waters of the Erythraean Sea break upon a bright red strand, and at no great distance from the Ocean lies a copper-tinted lake—the lake that is the jewel of Ethiopia, where the all-pervading Sun returns again and again to plunge his immortal form, and finds a solace for his weary round in gentle ripples that are but a warm caress . . .

Aeschylus, Fragment 67

OUR knowledge of Ethiopia begins relatively late in her history. Various vicissitudes were encountered in the early stages and there were many errors of judgement, as well as a few chance contacts that led to more hopeful developments, so that it is worth while perhaps to outline these events before going any further.

It was about the twelfth century that the western world began to turn its attention to Ethiopia, without as yet any very clear idea as to her identity. In 1165 or thereabouts the rumour began to circulate that there existed a Christian Emperor of immense wisdom and power, who ruled over seventy-two kings and whose empire was thought to lie somewhere on the route to 'India'. Such a fantasy, conceived at the height of the Crusades, no doubt owed its origins to the desire of Christian Europe to discover an ally somewhere beyond the lands overrun by the Moslems. It was thought first of all that this 'Prester John' might be somewhere in Central Asia, where it is true there were Nestorian princes. But there was nothing about these rulers that bore out the legend of dread omnipotence. Some sought an answer among the Indian Christian communities founded by St. Thomas, in the region of that apostle's tomb, while others turned their attention to the lands bordering the Red Sea, an area also included in 'India' by the geographers of the period. It was known from the pilgrims who visited Jerusalem, where they came into contact with Abyssinian monks, that there existed in that region a Christian kingdom called Ethiopia, which was governed by a great emperor renowned for his wisdom. Latin monks had already tried once or twice, as did the Franciscans in about 1289, to penetrate the area, but no one knows whether they ever reached it. The Venetian merchants were more successful: from the end of the fourteenth century dates a short itinerary which mentions the town of Asmara and also that of Aksum, where there was said to be a fine basilica whose interior was completely overlaid with gold: 'It is in this city that all the kings who serve Prester John are crowned.' The itinerary also names the province of Angot and that of Shoa, said to be the home of a Prester

John called David. To these details, which tally well enough with the facts—David reigned from 1382 to 1411—the manuscript adds a short glossary of authentic Ethiopian words.

From then on, information flowed into Europe. In 1457, Fra Mauro was able to compile enough to cram it all into a map which he streaked with rivers of a somewhat fanciful nature. But from 1431 onwards, if not earlier, an effort had been made on the part of the Papacy to establish a link with the Emperor through the Ethiopian monks at Jerusalem. It was hoped to find in him an ally for the deliverance of Egypt from the Moslems. In 1450 Alfonso of Aragon, with the same object in view, tried to enter into relations with the Negus Zara-Yaqob; he would have liked to set up an alliance with him cemented by an exchange in marriage. It is a pity he did not succeed, and that an Ethiopian princess in all her native grace never appeared upon the Western scene. Curiosity about the past very soon joined forces with this political interest; in 1459 the Duke François Sforza sent a personal letter to Zara-Yaqob, asking him, in the event of his having preserved any works of his ancestor Solomon that were unknown to Europe, to send them so that they might be translated into Latin; but nothing came of this.

Most of these attempts miscarried, sometimes as a result of geographical errors, as when envoys were sent by way of Persia, and in other cases owing to deliberate hoax on the part of certain Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem who were rather too eager to make a profit out of the interest their Emperor was arousing in the Latin peoples. One way and another, however, the contact was finally achieved. Franciscan monks actually succeeded in reaching Ethiopia and in making it known that the Negus was ready to join with the Papacy against his immediate enemy, the Sultan of Cairo. The King of Portugal, who more than anyone else was interested in securing this alliance against Islam, which was already attacking his forces in the Indian Ocean, succeeded at last in getting an ambassador through. This was Pedro de Covilham, who arrived in Shoa in 1493; but he never came back, and died there thirty years later, owing to the Ethiopian habit of detaining foreign ambassadors. In 1509 the Empress Helena wrote in reply to King Emmanuel, whose ambassadors she had received and to whom she was sending Matthew the Armenian as her negotiator.

Meanwhile in Rome the Ethiopian pilgrims from Jerusalem were becoming familiar visitors, and a hospice was established for them behind St. Peter's, next door to San Stefano—San Stefano dei Mori, for this church was later to be conceded to them. As a pre-

cautionary measure, before they could be permitted to celebrate Mass according to their rites, even their liturgical books were subjected to scrutiny, and this enabled Theseus Ambrosius to publish a grammar of their language, at that time designated as 'Chaldaic'.

Political events had now moved on. The great crusading plans which had been drawn together at last by Albuquerque had culminated in a precise strategical project aimed at Mecca. This, as not everyone is aware, was very nearly successful. One stage in the plan was to be a military link-up with the Emperor of Ethiopia. As a preliminary to this, an embassy was sent from India by way of the Red Sea, where the Portuguese fleet could be sure of a base. On the 10th April, 1520, at Massawa, Don Diego Lopes de Sequeira put ashore Matthew the Armenian, who was to guide a small party led by Don Rodrigo de Lima; in addition to the chaplain, Alvarez, it included organists, artists, and a typographer. A long time afterwards the news of their arrival upon Ethiopian soil was received in Europe and made public forthwith; the *Carta das Novas*, or *Letter Concerning News Sent to our Sovereign Lord the King on the Discovery of Prester John*, at last acquainted Lisbon and the West with this epic achievement. But the envoys did not leave the country until 1526, and it was not before then that anything was known of their adventures. On his return Canon Alvarez published an account of their journey into the interior of the country: *An Authentic Report on the Lands of Prester-John* (1540), a single volume, based on what Alvarez had seen, and so devoid of fabrication that it remains a classic. This description was at once translated into all the languages of the West and came out in innumerable editions. Interest in Ethiopia spread fast, all the more because a Portuguese army landed there in 1541 led by Don Christofe da Gama, a man of charitable disposition, in order to bring effective aid to the Emperor Claudius, who was beleaguered by the Moslems of neighbouring states. Then it was the turn of the Jesuit missions to penetrate into the country; they went on doing so until 1635, the date when Ethiopia finally shut her doors to Catholicism. The writings of Father Paez, of D'Almeida, and of the Patriarch Mendez, comprise a multitude of minute practical details; they furnished at last a comprehensive picture of the country, and thus supplied what had always been lacking in the editions of texts and grammars, excellent in other respects, which had already been published in Rome since the middle of the sixteenth century on the basis of material and manuscripts made available by monks from Jerusalem. As a result of the adventurous travels of Father Fernandez

even regions such as the Hadya were discovered, and their ancient character has never been better described. Thus within a century complete ignorance was replaced by first-hand information which the modern scholar can still turn up with confidence.

The path of progress had its darker side, however, such as the misfortunes of Father Damien de Goes, whose diminutive work on Ethiopian religion and costumes earned him the condemnation of the Inquisition and imprisonment at the monastery of Batalha, whose architectural attractions were not enough perhaps to console him. And later, about 1610, the sorry tale of the Dominican Urreta, who with a blind confidence published the details given him by Jean Balthazar, an Ethiopian and a notorious hoaxer of scholars, who had been running riot in Italy and Spain for the last thirty years or more. To him Urreta owed the substance of his fantastic *History of the Dominican Order in Ethiopia*, which peopled the great monasteries of Tigre with thousands of members of the preaching brotherhood who were unknown to Rome and with good reason. In spite of immediate protests from those who were better informed, these fabulous stories took in so many reputable scholars in later centuries that they still reappear in contemporary works of learned men normally regarded as serious writers.

Before much was known of Ethiopia she was imagined as a land arrayed in all the magnificence associated with Prester John. Did she lose this legendary garb once her true contours came to be clearly defined upon the maps of Africa? Far from it. Tradition and the Aksum manuscripts made it known to travellers that the Emperor was a descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Ethiopia has always been proud of her strange monuments whose history plunges into the depths of antiquity. She has retained many customs that date from Biblical times, those for instance that with all their wealth of symbolism are associated with the Imperial Coronation. A country such as this must have a prodigious store that has yet to come to light and that might so easily have been lost for good.

The missions left Ethiopia, as we have seen, in 1633. Nearly a hundred and fifty years were to pass before further European travellers penetrated into the country. The passage of time was not however unfruitful, since Ludolf was able to publish both a history and a dictionary on the basis of the abundant documentary material he collated. Then in 1769 a great advance was made with the advent of the Scottish traveller Bruce, who reached Gondar by way

of Egypt and the Sudan. The story goes that the Emperor bestowed on him the title of provincial governor of Ras-el-Fil, but we have only Bruce's word for this. At all events he was personally associated with the troubled life of Ethiopia during this period, quite apart from his discovery of the sources of the Blue Nile. He was thus able to bring back not only manuscripts from which he was able to make a reasonable translation of the old Ethiopian chronicles, but also an invaluable historical record of the more recent reigns and events which he himself had witnessed. He also gave a detailed description of the monuments of Aksum, but his ideas on the subject of Ethiopian antiquity were somewhat rigid and perhaps unduly influenced by the finding of a small Pharaonic stele that had strayed into the area, so that he was inclined to interpret everything as of Ancient Egyptian origin. To him a tall stele was an obelisk; and where he was convinced he had seen a statue of Anubis or a Sphinx neither his predecessors nor his successors saw anything of the kind.

Fortunately for the scholars, the European exploration going on in Southern Arabia gradually began to shed more light on the actual origins of Ethiopian civilization. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the ruins of Aksum and Yeha, where Sabaeen inscriptions were at last recognized as such, were recorded by Salt with a greater accuracy than hitherto. The monuments were studied and sketched, described minutely, and listed in ever-increasing numbers. Ethiopia was opened up anew to the numerous travellers who sought to become conversant with the life and customs of Gondar's turbulent Imperial Court or of the more peaceful Kings of Shoa.

A somewhat darker episode was the expedition led by Sir Robert Napier against the Emperor Theodore, who was eventually defeated at the burning of Makdala in 1868. Some five hundred manuscripts were brought back to England as a result, and their interest is by no means depleted as yet. Then, in 1893, a first-rate description of the historic sites of Tigre was published by Bent, and Scholler and Schweinfurth explored the remains of a large ancient city on the Kohaito, at the eastern edge of the steep Eritrean plateau. The period of strictly scientific work had begun, to be distinguished by famous names such as Enno Littmann and Carlo Conti-Rossini. Did these searching discoveries in relation to the monuments of the past tend to diminish the dazzling prestige of Ethiopia's lengthy history? On the contrary, we shall see later how the country came increasingly to reveal that distinctive vitality which for over two thousand years had sustained her civilization.



ETHIOPIA IN ANTIQUITY

ETHIOPIA is still steeped in impressive Biblical tradition. According to the chronicles the Emperor, 'Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah,' is the descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The Tablet of Moses, brought from Jerusalem after the founding of the dynasty, was carefully preserved in one of the sanctuaries in Aksum. The priests, as the successors of the Levites, still dance at the great festivals as David danced before the Ark. What is the origin of institutions such as these, which are the very life-blood of the Empire? They are worth a good deal of attention from historians, for they synthesize in symbolic form a past that is remote and to a large extent lacking in material evidence.

The Old Testament (1. Kings X) supplies the key to these traditional beliefs. It tells how 'when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones . . . And King Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So she turned and went to her own country . . .' According to the Ethiopians Solomon also gave her a son, who, under the name of Menelik, became the first Emperor of Ethiopia. This does not appear in so many words in Holy Writ, as a nineteenth-century historian of Tigre is careful to point out, but there can be no doubt that it was so: 'even if the Book makes no reference to it, it is none the less probable that Solomon had relations with the Queen, since everyone knows his inclinations were such'.

The official version of this tradition is contained in a somewhat voluminous work, much treasured, known as the *Kebra-Nagast* or 'Glory of Kings', the standard edition of which dates from the fourteenth century. This work is supposed to be a translation from a 'Coptic' original found before A.D. 525 amongst the treasure of St. Sophia of Constantinople. It takes up the rather sketchy Old Testament account and elaborates this into a lengthy story which

tells how the kings of Ethiopia, descendants of Solomon, were promised sovereignty over half the universe. According to this book the Biblical Queen of Sheba was Makeda, who ruled over Tigre, and whose emissaries journeyed and negotiated on her behalf as far as Egypt and India. On hearing from one of these about the wonders of the Court at Jerusalem and the wisdom of the king there, she visited him laden with gifts. She was honourably received by Solomon, but fell victim to a ruse by which he succeeded in possessing her. In the course of her journey home the queen gave birth to Ebna-Hakim, offspring of this transitory union.

The royal youth, after being brought up in Ethiopia, was sent to Jerusalem to receive his father's consecration; he was anointed as the sovereign of an Empire which stretched 'from the River of Egypt to the West, and from the south of Shoa to Eastern India'. Then Solomon sent him home, and with him, as Levites, twenty of the sons of the notables of Israel. But as they departed Ebna-Hakim and his companions carried off the Ark of the Covenant from the Temple and succeeded, before anyone caught up with them, in crossing Egypt and the Red Sea, going ashore at Bur and reaching Makeda's city, where the Ark was deposited. Then the religion and laws of Israel were established by the Levites throughout the kingdom—the new Zion. Finally, the account records the early wars waged by Ebna-Hakim—Menelik I—which led to a gradual extension of the Empire.

Other versions of this tradition are somewhat reminiscent of the Arabian legends of the fair Bilkis—the Arabic name for the Biblical queen. In some of these Makeda is supposed to have the feet of an ass; Solomon, in order to trick her into revealing them, made her walk across a floor of such clear glass that, thinking it was water, she lifted her dress. One story tells of the mirror which the queen was given by Solomon; she gave it to her son before sending him to Jerusalem so that having seen his own face he would be able to recognize Solomon instantly amongst all the notables in whose midst the king intended to conceal himself; for the boy was the living image of his father.

In much the same vein as the lengthy account given in the *Kebra-Nagast* other works have come to light, such as the increasingly enlarged editions of the *Serata-Mangest* or 'Order of the Realm', which lays down in detail the functions and practices of the Court. And it is still the same venerable tradition that is expressed in the Coronation ceremony as celebrated since the founding of Aksum, in front of the Cathedral of St. Mary of Zion. The Emperor,

on horseback, appears before the daughters of the city, who bar his way with a length of cord. He is challenged thrice by the women, after which they allow him to cut the cord and their proclamation rings out: 'Verily, verily, thou art the King of Zïon, son of David and of Solomon'; whereupon the sovereign is led to the ancient throne known as the Throne of David, where the crowning takes place, and then to the throne on which he is blessed.

These traditions, in literary guise or in the form of protocol, are derived from traditions and practices that are considerably older, with as many variants when one comes to look into them as there are districts in Tigre. The most characteristic of these popular versions tell how in the beginning the country worshipped a serpent to which an annual offering was made of a virgin bound to a tree. This serpent, 'Arwe, was the first king, who ruled until the arrival of a stranger called 'Angabo, by whom he was killed. 'Angabo rescued the maiden who was about to be sacrificed, married her, and obtained the throne. According to certain versions of the story, the virgin who was thus delivered from her fate was none other than Makeda, otherwise known as Azeb, who became the Queen of Sheba, 'Queen of the South'. Scarcely had she been freed from her bonds when she accidentally stepped in the magic blood of the dragon and her feet were changed into the hooves of an ass. This malady was later cured by Solomon, whom she visited in Jerusalem—the latter part of the story being in agreement with that contained in the *Kebra-Nagast*. The legend of the king-serpent, a survival no doubt of some primitive cult, is to be found all over Tigre, but is best known in the Aksum region, where the plain of Hasebo is still regarded by scholars as the kingdom of the dragon 'Arwe.

In addition to these ancient traditional beliefs there are mediaeval lists of the earliest kings, and it is interesting to note the many variations; some of the names which appear in these lists betray a vague familiarity with the existence of a past whose authentic monuments have for the most part disappeared. After Menelik I, for instance, comes King Gedur of the city of *Nouh*, who may be the Geder attested by a monument discovered not long ago. A place called Sado is also mentioned, and this is a name which occurs in ancient inscriptions as that of a suburb of Aksum. One thing that is apparent from a detailed study of the mediaeval Arabic documents is that in the East, at least until the tenth century, the Sabaean language could still be read to some extent, even though it had fallen into disuse. But at least the mediaeval scholars presumably had the benefit of many inscriptions since lost, to assist them in their

attempts to sort out for posterity the shreds of all these authentic names from the past.

Relics of ancient monuments gradually came to be surrounded by tale and legend, in the light of which many local sages have attempted to interpret the various sites. Thus the birthplace of Ebna-Hakim is said to have been not far from Massawa; near Dongollo, to the south-east of Hauzien, is an immense ruined site which is thought to be Debra-Makeda, the Mountain of Makeda. It is also claimed that the old capitals of Mazabar and Atsaba have been identified. But most of these theories are concerned with Aksum, where scholars point to ancient sepulchres which they attribute to Menelik I, Kaleb, and Gabra-Maskal. Thus the mediaeval collection of royal charters of gifts made to the cathedral of this holy city, a volume known as *The Book of Aksum*, has a two-page preamble outlining in a somewhat romantic vein the antiquities of the neighbourhood: 'It is said that there is at the base of the damaged giant stele a vast dwelling-place; at its four corners are four more great structures: if anyone enters with a light, it is blown out by the wind . . . There is also the house of Kaleb and his son Gabra-Maskal, built in the very bosom of the earth, complete with stelae. They say that the interior is filled with gold and pearls; it has one exit to Aksum and another to Matara . . . Then there is the tomb of Ityopis at Mazabar; a stele the height of a man was found there . . .' For Aksum would have liked to lay claim to all the ancient sites of Ethiopian tradition and to have been Makeda, Mazabar and Atsaba all at once. To this end the learned Aksumites thought up a highly ingenious mythical genealogy which made Kush, son of Shem, beget Ityopis (Aethiopis), father of Aksumawi, whose offspring became the founders of the holy city, giving their names to the various districts!

* * *

Apart from such traditions, with their blind respect for the past, what do we learn from the material evidence and the historic monuments? The earliest writings, which date from before the historical period in Ethiopia, go back to the Egyptians and Greeks and not to the Ethiopians themselves. They are sometimes just as difficult to interpret as are the legends, because they are geographically so misleading. But they are of tremendous interest because they tell us something of an era no trace of which has survived.

The Ancient Egyptians sent expeditions far down the Red Sea—which they described as green—and up the Nile in search of gold

mines and precious goods, and in so doing they came close to Ethiopia. The region is mentioned in the texts as 'The Land of Punt', 'God's Land'. By this they seem to have meant the southern coastal area of the Red Sea and possibly the eastern tip of Africa. For them it was already a fabulous region. There is an old Egyptian story which tells how a good-natured serpent of gigantic proportions speaks to a shipwrecked Egyptian whose life he has saved: ' . . . I am the Prince of Punt . . . But it shall happen, when thou art parted from this place, that never shalt thou behold this island more, for it will become water. . . . ' There is something about this story which is curiously reminiscent of the king-serpent 'Arwe! Other legends, for the most part handed down by Herodotus, but Egyptian in origin, tell how 'the' Pharaoh Sesostris carried his conquests as far as the inhabitants bordering the Erythraean Sea, and this is confirmed by Eratosthenes, who refers to a stele at Deire attributed to this ruler. We know in any case that an expedition was sent to Punt by Pepi II somewhere about 2400 B.C. Further voyages were undertaken during the eleventh dynasty, chiefly under Mentuhotep IV, to bring back rare produce from these regions. A vizier of Mentuhotep V, Amenemhet by name, appears to have established a port near Safaga to facilitate the regular departure of expeditions. But the most famous of these Egyptian voyages is that of Queen Hatshepsut (about 1520-1484 B.C.) who, not content with the acquisition of precious goods, had all the details of the voyage inscribed on the walls of her temple at Deir el Bahari. Five ships reached the shores of the incense country; the reliefs depict deck-houses, animals, and trees, as well as the ruler of Punt and his enormous wife. As Conti-Rossini writes in his *Storia d'Eniopia*, these scenes are doubtless meant to indicate the winter residence of a tribal chief who came down to the coastal region in the rainy season. 'No one yet knew the way to God's Land; no one trod the Myrrh-terraces, which the people knew not' runs the inscription on the reliefs, 'but it was heard of from mouth to mouth by hearsay of the ancestors. . . . ' There is no doubt that Hatshepsut was more than proud of her enterprise: 'But I have led them on water and on land, to explore the waters of inaccessible channels, and I have reached the Myrrh-terraces.'

After this there was no end to the voyages undertaken to the Divine Land. The inscriptions of Tuthmosis III refer to such places as *Outoulit*, *Hamasu*, and *Tekaru*, which suggest possibly Adulis, Hamasen, and Tigre. Horemheb records receiving the chiefs of Punt who bring him tribute in the form of gold, ostrich

plumes, and aromatic gum. The expedition sent by Seti I, which was as much a military venture as a commercial one, brought back all sorts of rare commodities. Similar undertakings were organized by Ramses III and Ramses IV, but by this time they had become routine and the inscriptions no longer offer much detail as to the nature of the country visited.

Proof of a closer association between remote Ethiopia and the Land of the Pharaohs has sometimes been sought in the so-called Ethiopian dynasty from the south—the twenty-fifth—which ruled Egypt between 751 and 656 B.C. and included the reigns of Piankhy, Shabaka, and Taharqa. This dynasty then retired to the depths of Nubia, where it established in the kingdom of Meroë in the course of the next thousand years an artistic and religious culture which became increasingly cut off from that of Egypt. The designation *Ethiopian* comes in fact from Greek historians, who have bequeathed us their extremely useful classification of the dynasties, and who applied the term Ethiopian indifferently to any African who was more or less dark-skinned. They were alluding in fact only to Nubians. But many writers of the sixteenth century, and even, in the case of Bruce, as late as the eighteenth century, were misled by their respect for the authors of this terminology into using such terms as *pyramid* and *obelisk* for the monuments of Aksum, and tended to interpret everything as an instance of survival from Pharaonic times. There is no doubt that there were isolated cases both in antiquity and in medieval times of intrusive elements: certain types of instruments, certain practices, even groups of people, spread into Nubia from the land of the Pharaohs and thence reached the high plateau, in the same way as racial types, beliefs, and distinctively Ethiopian objects gradually filtered into Egypt. Some of the people one sees in Shoa and the Gojjam region attest such sporadic immigration, sometimes quite startlingly, in their carriage and hair styles, the types of furniture they use and the jewels they wear. In Egypt such links with the past, so far as we know it from the tomb-paintings and reliefs, are on the whole less evident today than in Ethiopia. But none of this helps to determine the precise nature of the early contacts. The only relics of Ancient Egypt so far retrieved from Ethiopian soil are a stele to the god Horus, which was seen by Bruce at Aksum and has since disappeared, and three bronze vases which will be described later. These few objects are late and by no means typical. In these days any Egyptologist who attempted on the basis of such slender evidence to include Ethiopia in his field of study would only bring ridicule down on his head.

The Ancient Greeks, unlike the Egyptians, had nothing but eulogy for Ethiopia in their legends. In the *Iliad* there is a reference to Zeus departing to join 'the virtuous Ethiopians' at a feast; and there is a quotation from Aeschylus at the beginning of this book. Diodorus goes so far as to say that it was from the Ethiopians that Egypt derived her worship of the king, who was regarded as divine, her conservation of the royal sepulchre, her achievements in sculpture, and even her hieroglyphic script. Even more remarkable is the kind of concept of Ethiopia commonly held, which sometimes embraced the entire African continent and sometimes consisted solely of Meroë. It was only after Alexander in fact that the routes to Punt were effectively opened up to the Greeks, when the Ptolemies succeeded the Egyptians on the throne of Egypt. From then on a number of books of sailing directions were compiled, many of which are now lost. Depots were set up all along the coast at sheltered spots to store the commodities popular with the local chiefs: ivory, skins, ostrich feathers, and even live elephants. But writers who make reference to these havens specify only the inhabitants of the arid coastal regions, the fish-eaters and cave-dwellers, who were not exactly civilized. Amongst the many records of these discoveries is the stele inscribed in hieroglyphics found at Pithom; it was put up in Egypt at the order of Ptolemy II and refers to the founding of Ptolemais Epitheras somewhere between 269 and 264 B.C. on the Erythraean coast, not far from the Baraka delta. A few decades later there occurs a possible reference by the geographer Eratosthenes to Lake Tana, which was known to the ancient Greeks as Psebo or Koloë, and to its island, Dak. Agatharchides applied himself to the task of describing the habits of the cave-dwellers, by no means unlike those still in existence in these parts. They lived in the desert area close to the sea, their diet consisting, during the rainy season at least, of an ill-prepared mixture of milk and blood, their clothing a girdle of skins. They practised circumcision; the women, apart from those belonging to the chiefs, were common property; some of them went in for leather shields and knobbed maces; others used the bow and spear. Artemidorus, in less ethnological vein, gave concrete details about the coastal configuration, naming various ports, and in the desert region of Dankali he indicated the existence of certain lakes which may be those of Assal and Awssa. Farther away lay the incense region, flanked by a promontory with a shrine and dense foliage. Farther off still, according to his description, was what can probably be identified as the Harar district and the valley of the Awash. But no

one really knew the interior of the country, where, apart from great rivers such as the Astaboras—possibly the Baraka?—and the lake known as Psebo, otherwise Tana, it was mostly a matter of guesswork as to the world inhabited by such people as the *Sembriti* or Foreigners, whose queen was said to rule over a kingdom that stretched as far as Meroë.

Raydan! My Zafar palace, my home,
Wherein my forbears our courts have founded,
These green gardens of the land of Yahdib
Are by eighty water dams surrounded.
Their flowing waters flood the fields around,
Where the rich products of the land abound.

The accounts of Egyptian travellers, the sailing-courses of the Greek navigators, and mediaeval traditions handed down by the Ethiopians themselves have all helped to preserve the names of places, rulers, and ancient peoples, and one appreciates their authenticity all the more when the attempt is made to interpret them in line with the archaeological evidence in the hope of piecing together the early history of the country. Our knowledge of Ethiopia's past as derived from authenticated remains is certainly somewhat slender as yet to warrant an unequivocal link between traditional belief and the monuments themselves. But it is already possible to discern the early stages of progress towards a purely Ethiopian civilization and empire.

There is not much to be gained from a recapitulation of the pre-historic period, with its rock engravings and stone implements; much of it is obscure, although there are certain features of stock-breeding and agriculture that had a hitherto unsuspected bearing on later developments. Nor is it particularly helpful in this preamble to attempt a geographical description of the high Ethiopian plateau; the maps indicate at a glance the general lay-out and main features. But a few words are needed to outline the formation of this curious mosaic made up of different races, languages, and religions, a part of which, once compounded, made its appearance upon the historical scene.

The early indigenous population was partly black and has few survivals today. We are told that there were subsequent waves of invaders of some consequence; they are said to have connexions with the same stock as the ancient Egyptians and possibly the

Europeans. They swarmed all over the country and are still recognizable in such groups as the Bilen and, more especially, the Agaw tribes. These are the people whom the Ancient Egyptians may have known from the beginning. In their turn, however, they were eclipsed by a third influx of people, fewer in number, and this time of Semitic origin, who appeared on the scene between 1000 and 400 B.C. They came mostly from tribes of the Sabaeen, Minaean, and Homerite kingdoms of *Arabia Felix*, as it was known to the ancients. They had indeed founded prosperous cities on the fertile plateaux of the Yemen and by dint of great ingenuity in the building of dykes and aqueducts had promoted the cultivation of incense-trees and spices. The plateaus of Tigre held out the promise of an environment not unlike their native land, and it was here that they settled. Some of them reached the region of Harar, and pushed on still further to Guaragué. Others even spread into Azania, the other side of Cape Guardafui! But the most important historically were the *Habashat* and the *Aguezat*, who settled in the north of Ethiopia and in the process of assimilation with the local population brought about a cultural transformation. They brought with them gifts beyond price: religion, a more highly developed social organization, architecture and art, and a system of writing. The complete assimilation of these new elements by the people of Tigre and later by those of Amhara was to bring about the development of modern Ethiopia.

Wherever the newcomers settled their temples replaced the old cults associated with the worship of trees and water, the serpent-king, and an assortment of sacred totems. What was the nature of their religion? We know nothing of it save for a few monuments and votive inscriptions, which are more or less akin to the cult-practices of Southern Arabia where, in accordance with traditional Semitic belief, the chief deities worshipped were the Sun, Moon, and Venus, the heavenly triad. The oldest temples of Tigre still bear the names of sacred sites in Arabia dedicated to these gods. It seems that the ancient deities feared exile even more than their human worshippers did! At all events the emigrant gods received the same devoted care in their new environment as in their native land. Were the new high-walled temples the seat of oracles as before? Were they inhabited by priests and hierodules as in the Yemen? There is no doubt that the cult of the guardian deities of the holy Sabaeen cities was faithfully observed. Sin, the Moon God, was worshipped at Yeha; Ashtar, the planet Venus, greatest of all the deities, was also venerated there, together with Nuru, 'The

Shining One'. At Yeha too, and in the region of Azbi, the Moon God was worshipped under the name Almuqah, and his two sanctuaries were called Aowa after the name of the Sabaeen temple to this god. But in the highlands of Tigre the names and functions of the gods became gradually differentiated from those of their native country. Of this religious development we can trace no more than the outward signs, but it may be that it was at Aksum that the transition was most marked. Here the sun was worshipped under the Sabaeen name Zat-Badan, a goddess whose sacred animal seems to have been the horse. The worship of a triad was subsequently introduced: Ashtar, or Venus; Bahr, the Sea-God; and Medr, the Earth-God. Later kings adopted a tutelary deity in the form of Mahram, God of War, who came to be identified with Mars, and Bahr was eventually made both god of the sea and of the earth.

Temples and altars were dedicated to each of these deities. *Ex voto* offerings took the form of sacred enclosures, probably planted with trees that were especially prized. Incense was burnt upon finely carved offering-stands. Statues were wrought in gold, silver, and bronze, no trace of which has survived, and huge thrones hewn out of rock and adorned with lengthy inscriptions in commemoration. Up to the time of Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity a victory was always the occasion for a blood-sacrifice, beasts and prisoners alike. Finally, a funerary cult is attested by temples such as those set up on the tombs said to belong to Menelik, Kaleb, and Gabra-Maskal, and by the offering-tables placed at the foot of the monumental stelae. But such tombs as we have so far uncovered in the neighbourhood of these stelae have been devoid of objects and seem to have housed only skeletons, a last sacrifice having been offered before the tomb was closed and its position concealed.

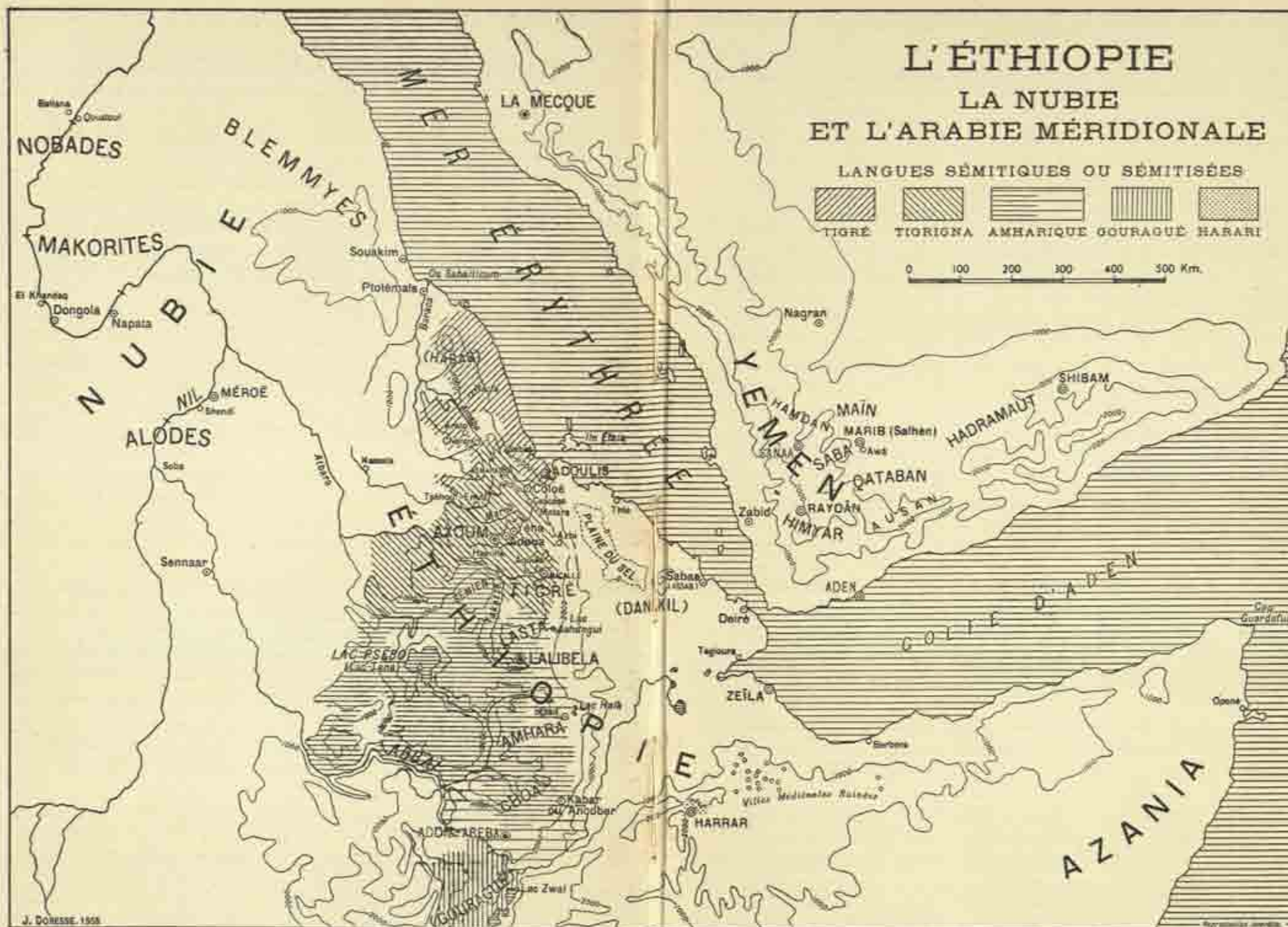
Southern Arabian institutions, like the religion with which they were closely associated, were also brought in by the immigrants. In the early period political power was the natural prerogative of the priests; it belonged to the *mukarib*, who was both high priest and governor, like Melchisedek of the Old Testament, who was both king and priest of Salem. The only example we know of in Ethiopia seems to have had much the same authority as in his native land of Saba. There were also *nagashi*, collectors of tribute, who acted as princes responsible for the government of certain areas; were they perhaps the vassals of more important rulers who had remained in Arabia? Nobody knows. The title of king, *malkana*, appears as a later development, signifying the emergence of independent personal control, and in Saba the same thing happened, the *mukarib*

soon becoming superseded. Probably the *nagashi* also became more independent. At the same time the patterns of Sabaeen social and family life were beginning to influence the population of Ethiopia, a patriarchal society having been introduced into a setting in which hitherto authority had always been vested in the woman.

An unusually impressive type of art and architecture, as we shall see later, developed in Ethiopia from Yemenite prototypes and may even have reached a higher level of achievement. At all events we know that there were altar carvings and that temples and palaces were constructed. But the outstanding contribution was the introduction of a written language, an unfailing source of power in the history of every civilization.

Up to the beginning of the Christian era or thereabouts inscriptions on stone were in Sabaeen or Minaean dialects written in the elegant South-Arabian form, using consonants only. It will be remembered that this system of writing was closely related to the Phoenician, from which the Greek alphabet was derived. From this there evolved a distinctive form, an expression perhaps of the creative spirit activating the youthful civilization of Ethiopia. An almost cursive script was adopted, with small signs attached to the letters to indicate the vowel accompanying each consonant. In the meantime the language itself had undergone certain modifications, so that some of the consonants required in Sabaeen had been dropped. Thus in the course of the first three hundred years or so of the Christian era a written language became established under the name of Geez, from *Aguezat*, one of the principal groups of settlers in Ethiopia. The immense literary achievements of Christian Ethiopia were due to this great step forward, and it was this form of writing that was adopted for Amharic, the more recent language which is in use today in the central area of the country.

Where precisely was it that these achievements took place, ranking Ethiopia amongst the great nations of antiquity? The monuments are few and for the most part in ruins, but it is still possible to trace the early settlements by the names still extant in the areas where they grew up. Like those of the shrines that were put up, these names are an exact counterpart of those of the small Sabaeen towns from which the immigrants had come: Saba, for example, and Assab, near Massawa; Sahart, in Tigre; Hausien, Aowa, Madara, and Dahane; each has its parallel in the Yemen area. This new influx of people is thus attested over a wide area extending from the north of the Red Sea as far as Enda-Mohoni and from the coast at least sixty miles into the interior of the plateau.



[1] Map of Ethiopia, Nubia, and Southern Arabia, showing distribution of linguistic groups. These tell their own story of the early settlement and development of Ethiopia. Coming from the south-west of Arabia, the settlers entered mainly by the port of Adulis, which is the nearest to the high temperate plateau framed by the torrid desert. The northern part of this massif, some 6,000 feet high, was to form the setting for the Empire of Aksum; the newcomers there established their Semitic language, from which that of Tigre and Tigrigna are the direct descendants. In the Middle Ages, when the Empire was deprived of its maritime outlets, it extended towards the south of this mountainous region. But here the speech derived from South Arabian dialects mingled closely with the indigenous tongues, losing many of its primitive characteristics, and thus Amharic came to be produced.

This map was specially prepared by the author for the original French edition.

Here and there throughout the area are the remains of the ancient cities, along the routes that climb up to the interior from the coast. Some, scattered between the Baraka and the coast, have not yet been fully explored. The principal ones lie along the route which rises from the port of Adulis to scale the steep plateau beyond. In the days when Aksum was prosperous this was the great high-road for traffic; it passes the old ruined city of Koloë and the remains that lie scattered around Matara, arriving eventually at Yeha and the former capital city, Aksum.

Further south on the Tigre plateau there are more remains, near Dongollo, in the Hausien area, and at Quiha; in short, they are to be found from the eastern mountain passes of Enderta to the Garalta chain and the forbidding foothills of the Amba-Alagi whose defiles from time immemorial have been the approach to the great uplands of Lasta and Amhara. It is not known whether the Sabaean colonization extended beyond this high mountain barrier; the strange stone sphinx of Meshal-Dengia suggests that it did. One day, perhaps, someone will find traces of these settlers further afield, if it is true that, as reported by Alvarez in the sixteenth century, stone thrones and monuments 'resembling those of Aksum' lie hidden in the neighbourhood of Lalibela.

Lastly there is no doubt that the influence of Southern Arabia penetrated in other directions beyond the framework in which the civilization of Ethiopia developed. Infiltration in the vicinity of the sea ports of Berbera, Zaila, and Tajurah is not improbable; there were certainly settlers at Deire, where ancient storage-pits for grain have been found, and from there along the tracks of Dankali, possibly as far as Harar where inscribed monuments have been reported.

However this may be, these settlers were first-rate agriculturalists, bringing fertility to the land and the material benefits of civilization wherever they founded their colonies; did they not bring with them the arts of irrigation, the use of metal, the horse and the camel? No doubt they also increased their wealth by acting as intermediaries between the inhabitants of the interior and the Egyptian, Greek and Syrian traders who frequented their ports. In common with their Arabian kinsmen they were natural warriors, ready for any campaign however far afield, establishing their power by safeguarding the great communication routes which they controlled.

As for their internal affairs, the inscriptions suggest that at first, in accordance with their native tribal loyalties, they set up rival provinces governed by chiefs who were more or less independent.

Details and names from this remote period are not entirely wanting; the evidence from the inscriptions is certainly slender, but it affords a few invaluable landmarks.

In the temples of Yeha, some thirty miles to the east of Aksum, are some of the earliest dedications to the gods. But these religious texts, which go back to the days of the first settlers, have yielded nothing in the shape of historical or datable evidence. For this one must turn to a city such as Aksum, where a fragmentary inscription preserved at Abba-Pantaleon records victories won in Arabia. There are also more recent monuments such as the stele of Anza, from the Hausien district; this was erected by an anonymous king of the Agabo, a tribe which were to appear very much later as allies of the Aguezat in an ill-starred conflict with King Ezana. Another name which has been preserved is that of Waran-Haiwat, who put up a stele in the third or fourth century B.C. Later information is less vague; in the second or first century B.C., clashes in south Arabia led to the intervention of Gadarat, ruler of the Habashat who had settled in Ethiopia. But despite the dedication of thirty golden statues to the gods—a detail recorded in an inscription of his allies in the Yemen—his forces later suffered a temporary defeat. In all probability this Gadarat has no connexion with his near namesake Geder, a *nagashi* of Aksum who commemorated his victories in the earliest cursive inscription yet known.

Another ruler of whom we have a definite record is the one who dedicated a small incense altar discovered by our expedition near Azbi. His name is mutilated. He was the son or grandson of one of the notables of the Sabaeen city Raydan, and thus belongs to one of the last generations of conquerors. The magical title he bears, that of *Mukarib of Saba*, is one that was discarded at a fairly early period in his native land, possibly about the sixth century B.C. But in the case of this emigrant it may not necessarily indicate an actual position of authority in the city of Saba. At all events he gives as an additional title, this time quite a factual one, King of the Aguezat and Tsarane; with the help of certain other inscriptions it is possible to place the first of these tribes to the west of Agame in the same area where the monument was found, and the second to the north of the present town of Makalle.

With this survey of written evidence demonstrating how close were the racial and social ties that linked the emigrants to their homeland, we arrive at a period in which Ethiopia began to emerge as a national entity. This was the time of the trading expeditions dispatched down the Red Sea by the Ptolemies; by degrees

they came to frequent the Erythraean coast, disseminating every kind of Hellenistic influence including language, merchandise, and clothing. The ports which were opened up, such as Ptolemaïs, were no longer Sabaeen in origin but Graeco-Egyptian, graced with votive altars and inscriptions. Even Adulis, the most important of all these trading-ports, where the earliest remains are of the South-Arabian order, now took on the look of a provincial Graeco-Egyptian city. Doubtless a certain talent for making the utmost of these contacts with Greek civilization explains why Aksum, which used Adulis as its commercial port, grew sufficiently strong to control and later unify the principalities on the high plateau. All at once the Empire emerged out of the shadows of early Ethiopian history. About the middle of the first century A.D. a Graeco-Egyptian wrote the celebrated *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, in which he described Zoscales, King of Aksum, as 'the most miserly of men, too much given to storing up great wealth, but in other respects able, with an excellent knowledge of Greek literature'. No doubt this ruler already had an extensive area under his direct control; he dispatched caravans to distant destinations beyond Lake Tana, and in the neighbourhood of Meroë inscriptions bear witness to the advent of his representatives who were in trading relations with Egypt by way of the Nile.

Another prince, with the Hellenized name Sembruthes, the *King of Kings* of Aksum—the first appearance of the imperial title still used by the rulers of Ethiopia—dedicated a stele in Greek at Daqqi-Mahari, which is the site of an important shrine; this was about the second or third century A.D. At Adulis, sometime later, a lengthy Greek text was inscribed on a throne of stone, dedicated to Mahram; this was subsequently copied by Cosmas, the Byzantine traveller. The prince's name and titles are lost, but the rest of the dedication is eloquent. This conqueror subdued the peoples of Geez and Angabo; Adowa; Semen, whose people lived 'beyond the Nile in an inaccessible snow-covered region'; and Lasina and Gabala in the mountains where the warm springs gushed forth. He also vanquished the Tangaïtes on the borders of Egypt and sent an armed force to subdue the Himyarites and Khinedocolpites to the north-west of the Red Sea. Lastly, he set out from Leuke-Kome to campaign in the land of Saba. As victor over all these peoples he dedicated his throne in the twenty-seventh year of his reign. What period did this ruler belong to, and how much are we to believe of his recital of successful campaigns? It was nothing out of the ordinary for an Aksumite prince in the course of his career to en-

gage in operations against the Aguezat and the Angabo, who were tribes of Agame and Enderta. But to be campaigning further afield on the borders of Egypt, or sending warships against the tribes of north-west Arabia was going a long way beyond the usual routine operations. Conti-Rossini in his *Storia d'Etiopia* gives a plausible explanation; he connects these events with the curious fact that at Rome in 274 A.D. after the triumph of Aurelian in defeating Queen Zenobia, the captives from Palmyra included men of Aksum and South Arabia. It looks as though the king of Aksum who was responsible for the inscription was in alliance with Palmyra in the disastrous campaign led by that city against Egypt. His function would have been to divert the attention of the Roman garrisons stationed in the Nile Valley and to engage with the troublesome Bedouin tribes, who might have endangered the communication routes for Palmyra in the north.

Such a reign certainly indicates the powerful position to which Aksum had been elevated by her control of the Red Sea, Arabia, and Nubia. But after this spell of participation in international affairs Ethiopian politics reverted to normal. Towards the end of the third century A.D. the kingdom of Saba, which at that time had no hierarchical ties with Ethiopia, was in the hands of Skiamir-Yuhar'ish, who had in his power the remaining tribes of the Habashat who had stayed in their native land. The sudden intervention of the Aksumite princes against Saba and Raydan met with such success that they established their sovereignty more effectively than ever, thus gaining the distinction of the kingship over Aksum, Himyar, Saba, Raydan and Salhen. This victory has been attributed to King Afilas. The reason for this belief is that Afilas, in contrast to his predecessors who had retained the Sabaean coinage, struck his own pieces, thus making it clear that he enjoyed a position of independence not possessed by previous rulers. Now, having favoured the Roman style of his first coinage, he suddenly came out with a second type which bore his effigy both back and front, in other words a replica of the coinage of Arabia. This change-over can be explained only in terms of commercial necessity in the overseas territories he had subdued. In any case he was rendering a great service to the Aksumite monarchy and to the historians of posterity; many of those who succeeded him and did not continue with the manufacture of coins bearing their names and effigies were to slip quietly into oblivion. Endybis and Wazeb I, his two successors, left at least some record, the former finely-worked portraits on bifacial silver coins, the latter captions on bronze and silver pieces, no

longer in Greek but in archaic Geez, which died out not long after his reign; apart from which, history tells us nothing of these two rulers. By contrast one of the kings who succeeded them takes up the story again with titles even more splendid; he was responsible for the final overthrow of the kingdom of Meroë and erected amid the ruins of the enemy capital his stele commemorating his triumph, inscribed on basalt. So great was his power that he was able, as a reprisal for an attack by Constantine on his allies, the Belimyes, to seize a number of Roman ships not far from Adulis. The name of this ruler appears to have been Ella-'Amida, whose reign ended somewhere between A.D. 320 and 325.

His son, who succeeded him, was to be the greatest of the Ethiopian emperors of antiquity; his name was Ezana. At the start of his reign he was still a minor, and his mother acted as regent. His father had in addition arranged that he should have the guidance of two young Christians of Syrian origin, Frumentius and Aedesius, who had reached the country some time before as a result of a shipwreck. The reign of Ezana was to be distinguished by the founding at Aksum of a Graeco-Syrian Christian community and, later, by the gradual conversion of the sovereign himself and of the empire.

Our knowledge of Ezana comes chiefly from military operations as recorded in detail upon numerous stelae at Aksum. He undertook campaigns either in defence of his realm or to unify Ethiopia and safeguard the routes which meant everything to her prosperity. The royal titulary mentions his sovereignty over Himyar, Saba and Raydan, but this may have been presumptive rather than actually the case, as he does not appear to have carried his campaigns abroad. He brought peace to Tigre, subduing the Aguezat, Agabo and various minor tribes who no doubt became finally assimilated; he intervened against the Beja; and he marched into Nubia as far as the meeting of the Nile and Atbara, where he put up a victory stele.

But the inscriptions recording these successes are interesting not only for the accounts they give. They are also evidence of the religious conversion of the Emperor, the last one being no longer dedicated to Mahram but to the *Lord of Heaven and Earth*, indicating the advent of Christianity. It is also noteworthy that while the early ones employ an imperfect Greek or Sabaeen, the later ones use only one language, archaic Geez, whose script must have been in existence for a long time but apart from the shortlived coinage of Wazeb I had never so far been used for official purposes.

Thus with Ezana the Arabian invaders and their culture became finally assimilated. Certain Hellenistic elements had also been ab-

sorbed by the Empire before its sudden flowering as a distinctive civilization with its own form of Christianity, its own literary works in Geez, and its Aksumite art. The reign of Ezana, with the introduction of a religion, a language and a form of writing in addition to the unification and organization of the Empire as attested by his victories, brought together all the newest and most important factors which were to culminate in the formation of the Ethiopian nation, whose final endowment was its remarkable individuality in the annals of history.

The monuments and artistic achievements were to provide the most striking testimony of this cultural independence. Up to now we have been considering civilization in terms of dates, rulers, campaigns successful and otherwise, and the evolution of a language. But everything so far goes to show that these were factors affecting an essentially backward people struggling in an inhospitable land against the inroads of other disinherited tribes. All that is left of man's toil and endeavour in an Ethiopia that no longer exists is a ruined wilderness and a quantity of huge stone blocks once shaped and dressed. If only one could evoke a detailed picture of this period! But not a single poet has left behind him a description of the palaces and gardens of the time such as the dazzling accounts that have made the wonders of the Yemen so unforgettable. In few countries, moreover, has there been quite so much disregard for the past on the part of both man and nature; in the course of pitiless wars men have burned and wrought havoc to the extent of razing every building to the ground; and in the course of two thousand successive Ethiopian 'winters', nature's abundant rainfall has weathered away whatever still lay hidden under the soil. It is a very different story from that of Egypt with her privileged past, yielding fabrics, furniture, and vases four to five thousand years old, their form and colour sufficiently well preserved to give a magnificent picture of life in the ancient world. In Ethiopia nothing remains but hard stone, the hardest stone; nothing has emerged from our excavations—apart from the bare chronology which can be adduced—to tell us anything of the priests, the sacred vases, or the golden statues that once belonged to the temples of Yeha. The colours they wore, the kinds of weapon they used, the appearance of the chariots that clattered through the streets and squares of ancient Aksum, are completely lost to posterity; we know nothing of the royal collections of furniture and works of art once housed in palaces of gold and ivory that now lie in ruins. The old trackways ascending from Adulis, one to the west and the other to the south, divide the

ancient sites naturally into two areas. The tracks are now unusable, but were frequented by caravans right up to modern times as in the remote past. The ascent from the Dankali region in the direction of Tigre, Lasta, and Amhara is still, where it reaches the temperate plateau, a hive of commercial activity with a string of markets where in the days of old all the principal produce was unloaded. Travellers from other coastal ports and caravans coming from the Salt Plain used the road from the south, which climbed steeply up the narrow gorges to emerge upon a stretch of plateau now strewn everywhere with ruins; this is Enderta, flanked to the west beyond Hausien by the jagged barrier of the Garalta mountains, which are traditionally the site of the ancient royal tombs of Tigre. Nearer at hand is a stele put up by a former king of the Agabo; the site where relics of the saint-kings 'Abraha and 'Asbeha are worshipped; the scattered ruins of Makeda; the remains of the Aksumite 'basilisks' of Quiha and Agula, and a few other remnants of former buildings, all too often hidden by churches that superseded them. Part of the area away to the east is now beginning to assume special importance; here, in the neighbourhood of Dera and not far from the Senafa Pass, where an offshoot from the main track climbs to the plateau above, the country is wild and desolate. Historians have tended until recently to disregard this inhospitable series of ravines plunging down to the arid plains below, although the archaic names of sites such as Azbi, Angabo, and Aowa, all of which are in the vicinity, ought in fact to have attracted their notice. Similarly they might have lent an attentive ear to the local tradition that in the neighbourhood there was once a capital of Ethiopia 'older than Aksum'. There are also certain remains, such as the circular tomb on top of a mound and the obscure stele that stands forlornly at the distant edge of a field, which indicate that the region has an even longer history, just as in the neighbourhood of Gazien the rock engravings attest a primitive occupation. But it was sheer chance that led to the recognition of these sites as important, in a manner entirely unforeseen.

Not far from Hawile-Addi-Serao, a place which never appears on the maps because no geographer has so far set foot in this corner of the globe, there was once a large stone slab on the topmost point of a hill overlooking the valleys that disappear in the distant plains of Dankali. At certain seasons of the year the Moslems of the lowlands came to the stone to offer sacrifice, thus perpetuating without knowing it a rite that is a great deal older than either Islam or Ethiopian Christianity. One day, about 1951, they attempted to install an anchorite there; but the Christians who owned the land



[1] Ancient lion carved out of rock at Angiarro (Wallo). After T. Lefebure, *Voyage en Abyssinie*. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



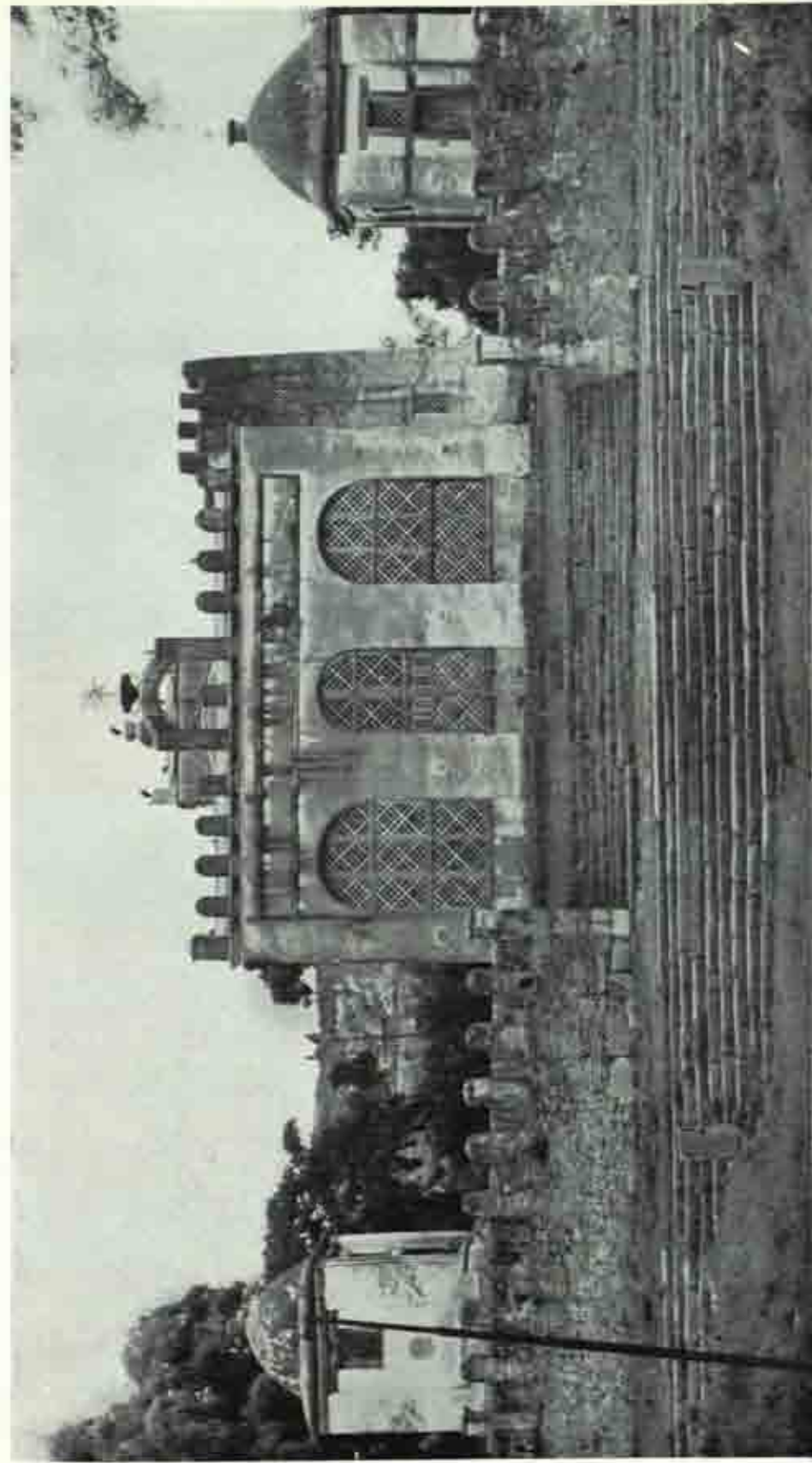
[2] Entrance to the Chapel of the Tablet of Moses at Aksum. Inside, on the sanctuary façade, are some fairly modern paintings including one of the Holy Trinity, represented by three figures which are very much alike. (Photo J. Duressé)



[5] King Solomon, by tradition the founder of the Ethiopian Dynasty. Miniature from a fifteenth century manuscript. (Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)



[4] King David. Miniature from a fifteenth century manuscript (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[51] Aksum Cathedral. Built on the site of an ancient temple, it is the holiest place in Ethiopia. It has suffered destruction on several occasions, the present building dates from the seventeenth century. (Photo: J. Dorosse)



[7] For the Ancient Egyptians Ethiopia was a place of legend, *God's Land*, the *Land of Punt*. As such it played a part in the religious myths associated with the Royal Tombs. Here, in the *Book of the Night*, sacred baboons are depicted at worship. The text runs: '... Their dwelling-place is the Land of Punt. They live in the country of the Ape-like Ones, close to the land of Outset and the Eastern Sea ...'. Curiously enough it was in these very regions, according to popular mediæval belief, that Paradise was to be found, along with strange men whose appearance was said to resemble dogs rather than apes—the Cynocephales.

After A. Piankoff and E. Drioton, *The Book of the Day and the Night*, Le Caire, 1942, p. 89 and Plate I.



[6] Aksum: Priest of the Chapel of the Tablet of Moses. (Photo J. Doresse)



[8] Reverse of silver coin from Baydan (Southern Arabia) bearing the name of Amidan Ba'in; possibly second century A.D. Similar coins have been found near Aksum, where they were in use before the first Ethiopian pieces were struck by Aphilas. Diameter: 14 mm. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



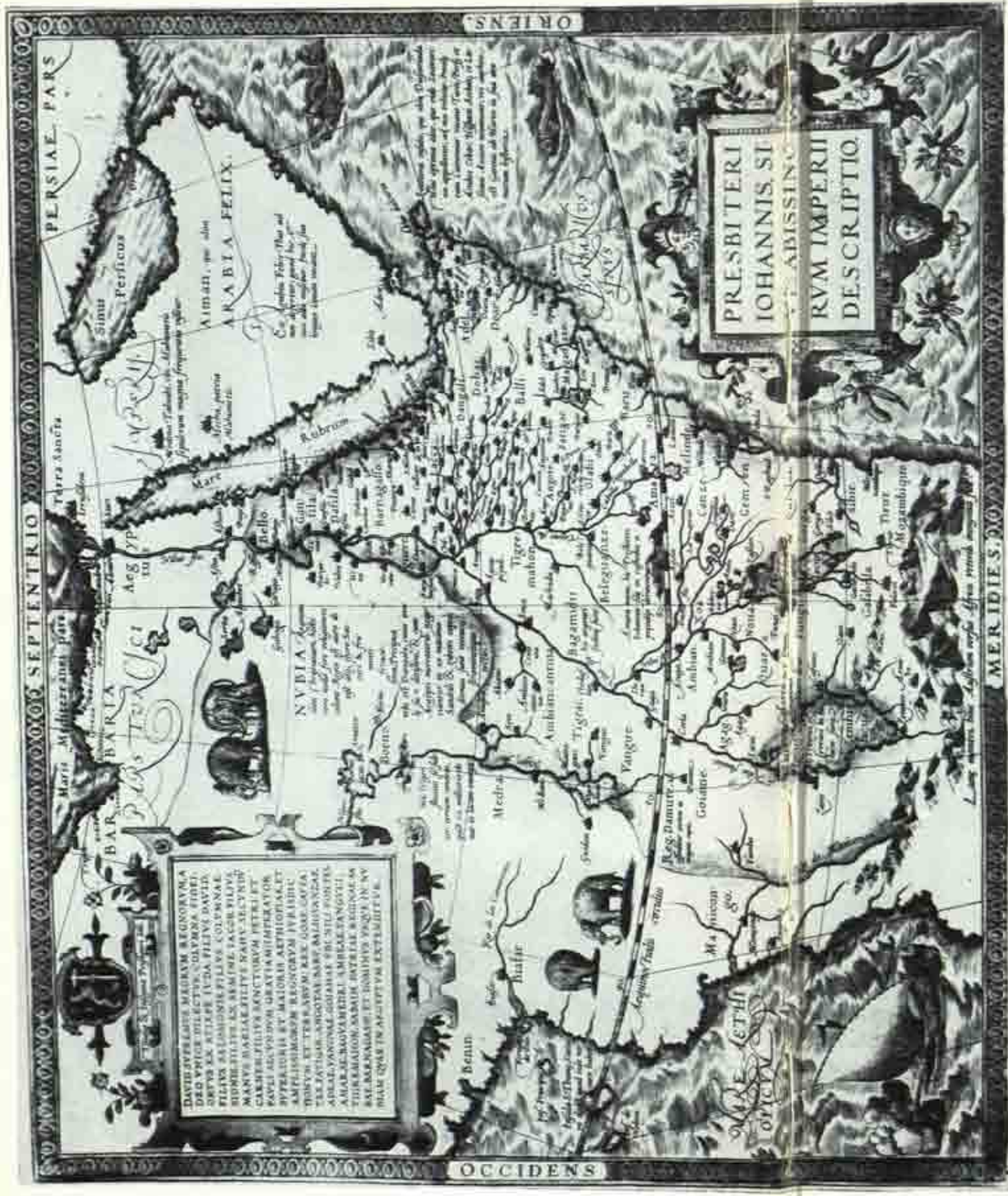
[9] Reverse of silver coin from Southern Arabia. This type, like the other, was also current in Ethiopia. Diameter: 16 mm. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[10] To the south of Shoa stretches the beautiful Lake Zoa. Here on its shores are boats made of reeds, after an age-old traditional type. (Photo J. Dorese)



[111] The same kind of reed boat was already in use in Ancient Egypt, as can be seen in this relief from a tomb of the VIth Dynasty at Saqqarah. (Photo J. Dorese).



[12] Map of Orlens, entitled *Description of the Empire of Prester John*, Antwerp, 1570.

Top left, in a square, are the "Titles of Prester John", which in this case are those of Lobna Dengel David II (1508-1530). It was he who opened up Ethiopia to the West by receiving, in 1520, the first embassy to succeed in reaching the country, that of Portugal. The arms which surmount this inset show the Lion of Judah holding the Cross; today this is still the emblem of the Empire. The map itself displays in an elegant confusion a region which at the time was almost unknown, half real, half legendary. Ethiopia is bounded on the north by Egypt and by Nubia, which is described as "a kingdom that was formerly Christian, but where there is no longer any religion—the Fungas had indeed not long since defeated the last of its Christian states—and as "very rich in gold, and abounding in ivory, sugar, and corn. The principal city is Dengola . . . To the west are the river Niger and the kingdom of Burma. Far to the south stretches the barrier of the Mountains of the Moon. On the eastern coast is Mozambique, and Malindi and the port of Mombasa. Between these boundaries Ethiopia has taken on an extraordinarily elongated appearance which it is interesting to compare with modern maps. Lake Zaire or Zambesi, bordered by Quara, the Galat and Gojjam regions, is in fact—only much too far south—Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile. In this lake there are Tritons and Sirens!—does he mean hippopotami and crocodiles? On its banks "Amazons are said to dwell"—the warlike tribes whose memory is preserved in the Ethiopian chronicles of the seventeenth century. The other lake, here called Zafian, may be Lake Zwaia, since Shoa appears just above it (as Noa), with its famous monastery of Debra Labanos (shown as Bilibanos). In the north Shoa ends at the mountain of Ambura, the "Amha Geshima, where as the cartographer correctly states "the sons of Prester John are kept prisoner"—for the ambitions of these princes were always regarded with misgiving. The Begameder, "where there are silver mines", is shown just above, and also, an outstanding feature, the river Takkaze, with its innumerable tributaries flowing down from the eastern edge of the plateau. Here and there above the valleys are dotted the various villages through which the ancient travellers had to pass after disembarking at Massawa (Massau) on their way to the Imperial Court in the Central province of Anilura. For this reason all this part of the country was better known and better recorded than the rest. To the east lay the Moslem states of Bali, Fatiga, Dawaro, Adal, and Danakali, whose furious onslaughts Ethiopia by some miracle had only recently survived with the aid of the Portuguese. In the north, constricted between the Nile and the Red Sea, lies the territory of the Bahar-Nagash (Barnagasso), which is now Eritrea. (Photograph Bibliothèque Nationale)



[15] Small incense altar from the region of Azbi-Dera. It was found in association with the statues shown below. The front and sides are covered with a Sabaean inscription recording the titles of a king of the *Tsuran* and the *Igacyan*, *mekarik* of Saba, etc., which would place this ruler among the early colonizers of Ethiopia. *Maximum height: 39 cm.* Now in the Department of Archaeology, Adilla Alaha. (Photo J. Doresse)

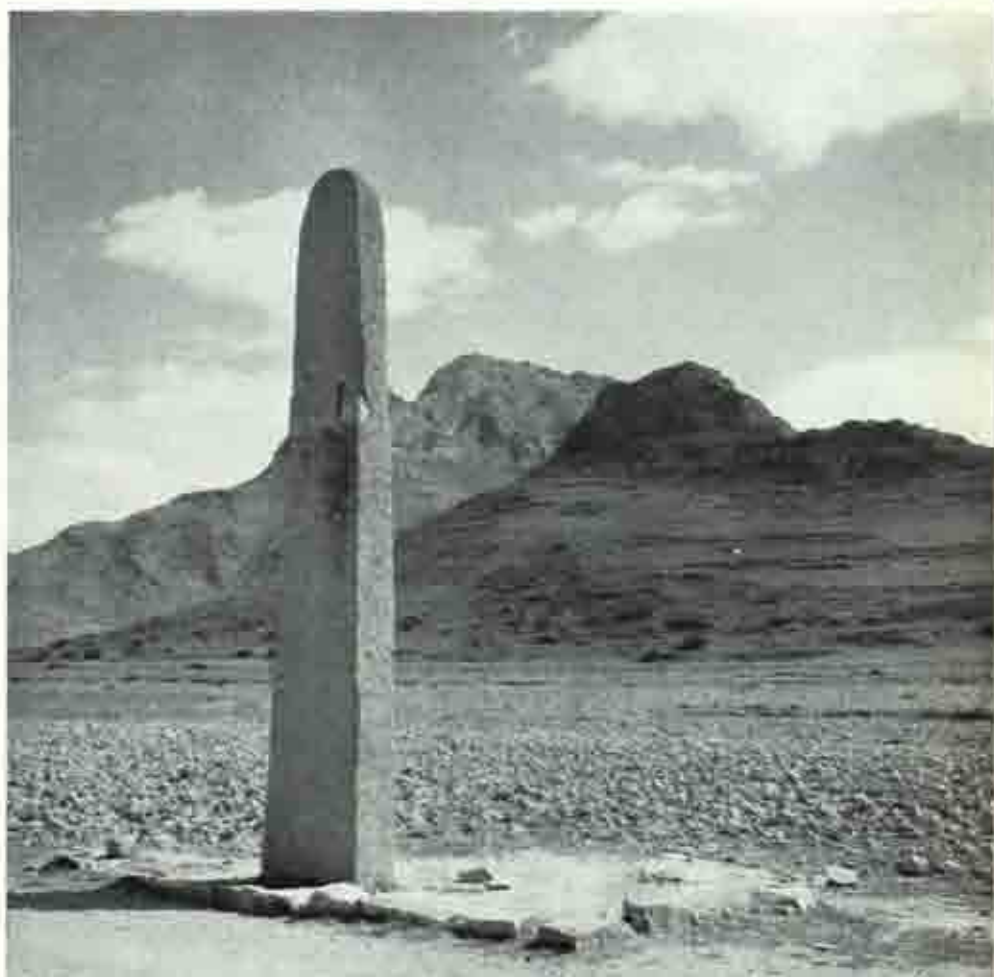
[14] This statue of a deity (?) also came from the region of Azbi-Dera, and was accompanied by bronze objects. The most interesting of these represented a throwing weapon, and bore a votive inscription of a prince of Aksum named Geder. In the foreground are two decorated bronze bowls—one of which is damaged—of Egyptian origin, belonging to the Saitic or Ptolemaic period. *Total height of statue: 61 cm.* (Photo J. Doresse)

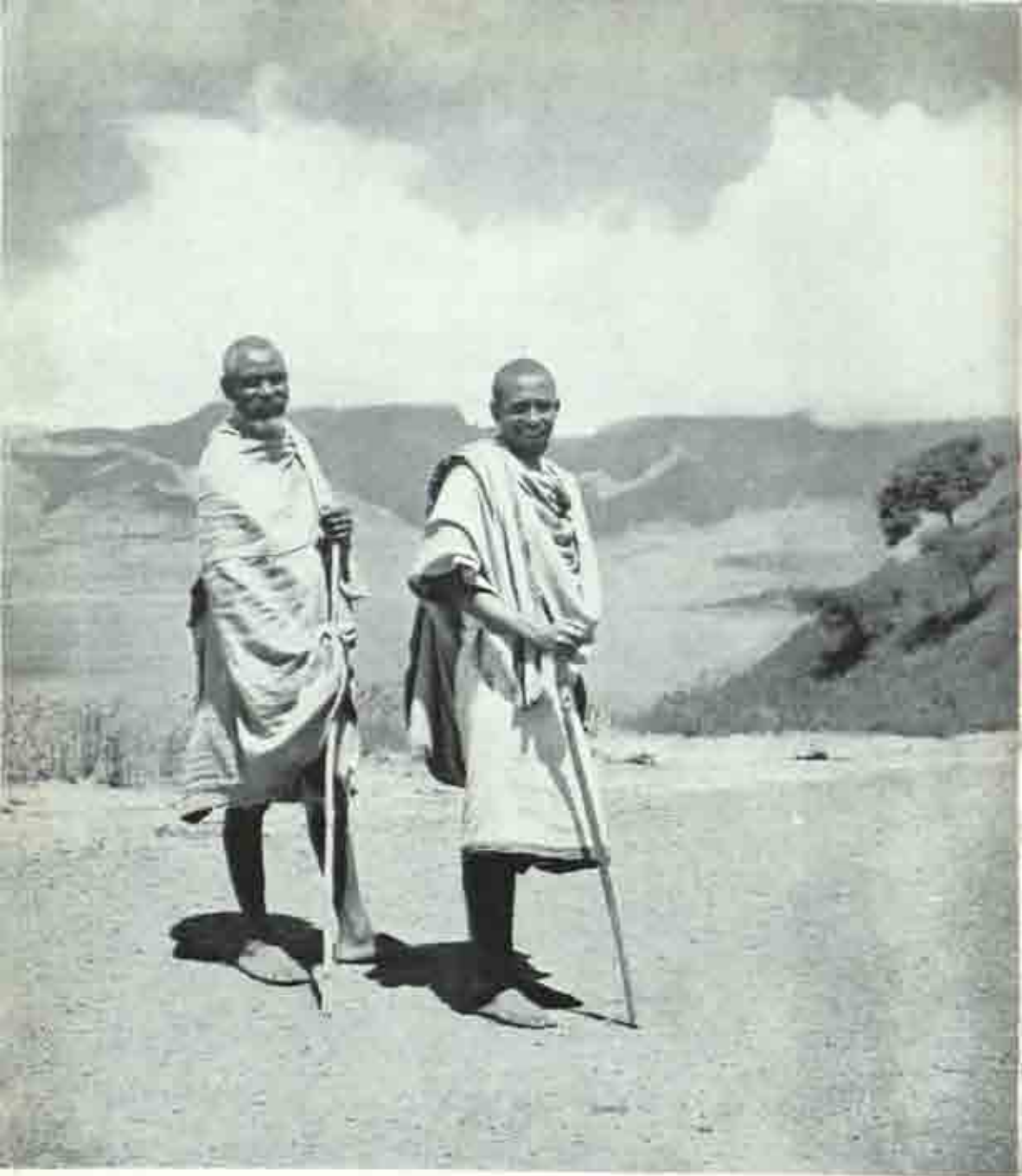


[16] Matara: Stele, possibly third or fourth century A.D. It is about eighteen feet high, and the four lines of inscription on the face (in shadow) are in archaic Ge'ez and no longer in Sabaean. It has been suggested that the words commemorate certain distinguished exploits on the part of the ancestors of the maker of the stele. (Photo J. Doresse)



[15] Yeha: Fragment of a frieze from one of the temples built by the Sabaean settlers. The illex, with their great curved horns, a common decorative motif in ancient Arabia, have here been subjected to a strange and compelling stylization. (Photo J. Doresse)





[17] Tigre peasants. (Photo J. Dureau)



[18] Ataya, between Dessie and Debra Sina. In those broad, hot, overgrown valleys, dominated by the high Menz plateau, a picturesque fair is held once a week near the village of Kura-Kurie; textiles and hides are bartered, along with gourds of honey or butter, and the fiery peppers that are indispensable to Ethiopian diet. Here two very different types of people meet: the Adal or Danakil, naked to the waist—both men and women—jostle with the Galla Gille, amongst whom the young girls often still wear the original native costume. This consists of a thick dress of white cotton with a coloured border, with heavy necklaces in which round amber beads and bright-hued stones are threaded together with silver balls. (Photo J. Doresso)



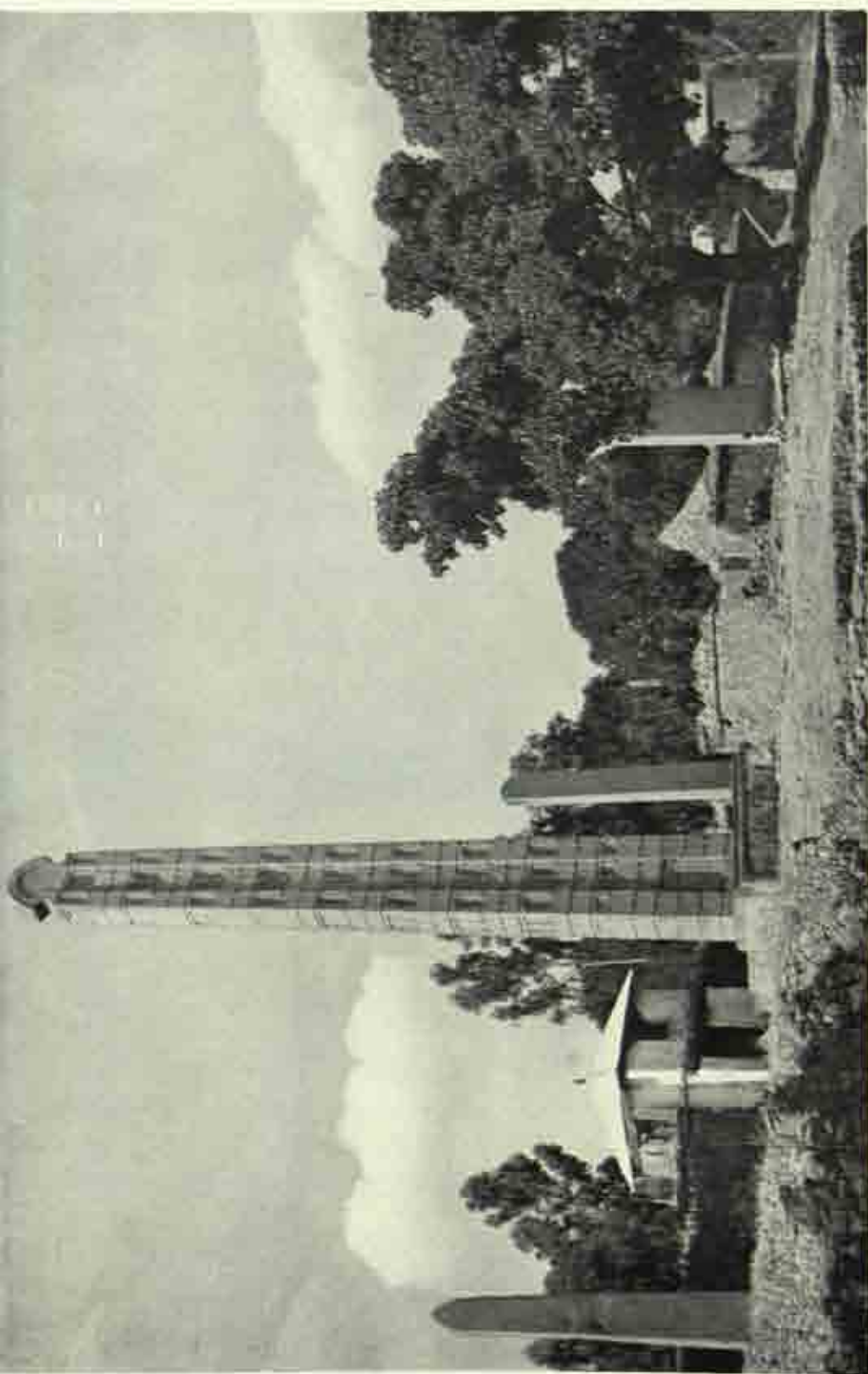
[19] Addie Ababa: Little girl from Shoa. (Photo J. Doresse)



[20] Yeha: Incense Altar, ornamented with crenellations and bearing a votive inscription in Sabaean. This monument dates from several centuries before Christ. It is now at the Department of Archaeology, Addis Ababa. Height: 60 cm. (Photo J. Dorosse)



[21] Aksum: Coin of Ezana before his conversion to Christianity. It is made of gold, and shows the pagan crescent and disc; the inscription is in Greek. On the reverse side the sovereign is depicted wearing a helmet. Diameter: 18 mm. (Photo J. Dorosse)



[22] Aksum: Stele. The big one seen here, with its lesser entourage, is over sixty feet high. It is decorated in the form of windows set in a timbered framework, one above the other, an ancient architectural style used in the north of Ethiopia and still employed today in the churches of that region. At the foot of the 'obelisk', in front of the carved false door, is a large stone offering-table. The great terrace on which the monument stands has gradually fallen into decay and become obliterated. (Photo J. Dorese)

drove them off and broke up the stone, hurling the pieces far and wide, so that they should never have any reason to return. When the rainy season came the soil, no longer protected, was gradually eroded, and the head of a statue was revealed. The peasants, in the hope of finding treasure, were preparing to dig when local officials arrived from the provincial government of Makalle, which had been warned just in time. The buried objects were unearthed and taken by pack-mule over rocky mountain paths to the county town of Tigre. It is alarming to think of these monuments in their already somewhat damaged condition being removed by untrained workers; but less injury was caused than might be expected, no doubt because to the Ethiopian anything that concerns his ancestors must be treated with great care and respect. In March, 1954 when we were touring round in search of antiquities our faithful companion Ato Admasu Shifarau came across these remarkable objects tucked away in the corner of an office somewhere. His Majesty the Emperor was kind enough to arrange that they should be made available to us forthwith and that we should have every facility to investigate the area where they had come from. A day spent in climbing unbelievable perpendicular heights brought us at length with our mules to the far end of Azbi-Dera. This was the site. By dint of careful questioning to make sure that the peasants remembered aright, it was possible to elicit the number of monuments and their arrangement. From this hole in the ground, which had never been filled in, a small stone statue had been recovered, its pedestal inscribed in Sabaean; there was also an incense altar dedicated by one of the kings of Aguezat; a bronze 'sceptre' which had been consecrated by a *nagashi* of Aksum whose name was Geder, its inscription in a cursive Sabaean script hitherto unknown, apparently commemorating a victory; and lastly four bronze bowls and cups which were also rare specimens, three of them having come from ancient Egypt. The statue, a seated figure on a cubic throne, seems to represent a god; the Sabaeans dedicated similar figures. The hands clasp a pair of cylindrical vases, resting on the knees. The sculptor has made a clumsy attempt to indicate the flower pattern which decorates the robe with its heavy fringe; and the empty eye-sockets, once probably inlaid with stone or shell, seem to stare into the middle distance. In the case of the fire altar, as with the statue, the style is very much that of the Sabaeans of Arabia, apart from the fineness of the carving. The ruler who dedicated the altar is known to have been designated *mukarib* in addition to his royal titles. But what about the strange bronze object, whose

apparently symbolic character led us to describe it, for lack of a more precise term, as a sceptre? This must surely be the device 'in the form of a plough' which, according to Diodorus (III, 3. 6) was carried by the priests and kings of Meroë. A strip of metal bent almost at right-angles, with a kind of furrowed appendage reminiscent of a sleeve, it seems not unlike a stylized throwing-knife; in other parts of Africa today this type of weapon, of a similar size, is still in use and in some districts has much the same function, being an emblem of authority. As for the Egyptian bowls, whose workmanship can be dated to the Saïte period or Ptolemaic times, they would have formed part of the merchandise that, along with popular fabrics, was still coming in to the kingdom of Aksum at the time of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. One is a large cup decorated on the inside with a representation of a string of cattle; the other, with its border of frogs emitting water from their mouths, must be for libations.

It was a strange assortment of objects, probably from more than one period, and certainly not easy to explain; what, for instance, was the 'sceptre' bearing the name of an Aksumite prince doing in this region? But there is everything to indicate considerable antiquity in the case of the major 'finds', the statue for example being of a type which may be as much as twenty-five centuries old, and the king who dedicated the altar identifiable as belonging to one of the early immigrant tribes from Arabia.

It is possible that they were hidden at this spot as a kind of sacred store-chamber following the destruction of some shrine or capital nearby, perhaps during the wars of Ezana and his predecessors against the Aguezat who lived in this region, or in the course of great religious reformations such as the conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity. The *nagashi* Geder has a name not unlike that of *Gadarat*, the king who intervened in Arabia not long before the Christian era; but, leaving on one side for a moment the strictly scientific considerations of history proper, one might suppose this unknown conqueror to be the mysterious *Gedur* who appears in the legends of Aksum as a giant king who lived to a fantastic age and is reputed to have been the third ruler of Ethiopia. These monuments, which seem to go back into legendary times, moved us very deeply when we discovered them; apart from their great age, they constituted the first assemblage of objects to be found in Ethiopia exactly as they had been deposited in antiquity.

But there are other more picturesque sites to examine, sites which yield an impressive historical record. If, on leaving Adulis,

we had entered the plateau region by the shortest route, we would have passed close to the ruins of ancient Kolöe, spread high upon an escarpment whose dizzy heights command the unfertile valleys that fall away to the sea. This was one of the great cities of old, where the inhabitants of ancient Adulis had their first depositories for ivory goods, and where they came in the hot season to escape the torpor and humidity of the coastal area; Massawa today, for several months of the year, furnishes a foretaste of hell. The ruins of Kohaito or of Toconda are barely visible now, but the outline of several structures can still be seen, in the form of basilicas built on terraces, a double row of sturdy square pillars dividing the interior into two parts. Otherwise nothing remains, or almost nothing. After journeying for some days the traveller would reach the Matara region to the south. Let us follow him along this route. The countryside is still barren, but less rugged. A flock of sheep wanders along past a stone stele with its carved inscription. But the relics of the market towns that were once so numerous in this neighbourhood are still a matter for the archaeologist; in other words, there is no visible sign of them. After this the road continues in a south-westerly direction; and the landscape undergoes a brutal transformation. At our very feet the plateau caves in abruptly before an immense span of huge intricate valleys, interspersed as far as the eye can see with range after range of tabular mountains, whose vertical flanks are deeply eroded and devoid of vegetation—the characteristic *ambas* of the Ethiopian landscape, natural fortresses where villages and monasteries are perched high up. As one comes down the valleys the vegetation becomes more and more luxuriant, till the track is finally lost in the distant lowlands, where clumps of giant euphorbia stand out here and there like majestic candelabras. Some distance away is a plateau crowned with dark trees and a number of buildings—the ancient inaccessible monastery of Debra-Damo. Across the horizon is a mountain barrier of lofty, blunted peaks, towering above us and gradually hemming us in, half-wrapped in the fresh green mantle of the countryside with its pattern of Tigrean villages, clusters of small square houses built with dry stone walling; the naked slopes rise far above, their gullies tinged with violet. Sixty years ago these shut-in plains with their surrounding ravines were the scene of victory for Menelik II. Within the framework of the massif lies a flat green stretch of land in the middle of which, on a mound encircled by a hamlet, are some buildings enclosed by a wall; this is Yeha, one of the oldest sacred places of Ethiopian history. Tradition states that the Queen of

Sheba had her residence there, and it is also said that King Gabra-Maskal built there. How much remains? First, to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the historian, there are numerous fragmentary inscriptions in dedication of temples, sacred enclosures, and incense altars, for the most part damaged. Some belong to a Sabaean type of epigraphy older than any other yet known, even in Arabia. But they are all undatable, and we have no means of identifying the people who were responsible for these acts of consecration to Ashtar or Nuru, even though the lofty walls of their most important shrine still stand in a ruined state before us. This rectangular temple, which is built of finely dressed polished limestone—it used to be said that a Sabaean construction could be filled with water without a drop being lost—has lost its coping and frieze and possibly also the upper storeys. But a striking beauty remains in the perfection of its walls, which are delicately inclined inwards, the lateral grooves carved with immense care to take the inside edges of the folding-doors. It would be worth exploring the lower part of the construction and the pavement, which was clumsily remade when in Byzantine times the temple was made into a church; a first crypt, which it is true was devoid of objects from the past, has by chance come to light. Around the building are several stelae still standing, with the remains of offering tables. Close to the modern white church which a few years ago replaced a very much more interesting chapel, the latter also having been built no doubt on the foundations of an even earlier temple, are a few blocks of stone carved in more or less geometric designs, all that remains of the chapel. Into the façade of the church—such is the devotion always shown by the Ethiopian towards his past—a fragment from a frieze, carved in an entirely original manner, has been carefully fitted; it depicts animals, six in all, front view, almost geometric in style, with cylindrical muzzles and curved feet: are these the ibex sacred to the god Almuqah, as often seen in the art of South Arabia? A little further on, amongst the present-day houses, stand the remains of huge square pillars which once formed a porch and colonnade belonging perhaps to a 'basilica' like those of Kohaito or Agula. Lastly, in the corner of a field, is the square-cut entrance to an unexplored underworld. Are there tombs concealed in the mountains close by? This sacred place, one of the oldest occupied by those who brought civilization to Ethiopia, invites exploration, and may one day yield promising results.

For the traveller of old it was possible to go from Yeha, which probably had a number of other settlements round about, to Aksum in a single day. He would already have been on the road for eight days from the coast where he had come ashore. Several hours' journeying through the mountains, climbing all the time, would bring him to a valley swept by a torrent, a few stunted palm-trees—rare at this altitude—offering a meagre shade. After this he would emerge into more open countryside, where Adowa is today. Going on from one hill to the next, over plains which must have been diligently cultivated—sixteenth-century travellers reported that they were still fertile—he would soon come within sight of Aksum, recognizable from afar by its shrine perched high on top of an escarpment, the sanctuary which is now the picturesque chapel of Abba-Pantaleon. It was the custom, according to tradition, to remove one's travelling garments under the shade of a large sycamore tree, an offshoot of which still flourishes today, and to garb oneself in something rather more elegant. One could then proceed into the city, passing the foot of the hill known as Medfa-Walatu, the site of a necropolis, where the first stelae begin to appear. Next came the Sado quarter, near which King Ezana, first in the name of pagan gods and afterwards to a unique deity, erected the traditional thrones of stone, inscribed with the accounts of his victories. The way probably led past a palace in the vicinity of Me'eraf and then, leaving the sacred enclosure wall on the left and on the right more rows of votive thrones, straight before the seven gigantic stelae, the most striking monuments of ancient Ethiopia. They stood upon terraces of carefully fitted and polished stone, with offering tables at their base, and all around for a distance of over half a mile were stelae, an army of stelae in stone, stelae of all sizes ranged in serried ranks. Aksum may well have had other sights to offer that were even more spectacular; such, at all events, is the scene most vividly evoked by the ruins as they are today. But there is not much to be said for such attempts to evoke the past, since it may not have been like that at all. Ruins that date from a number of different periods have to be looked at in perspective; otherwise one is apt to get the wrong impression. For Aksum is a huge site, nearly two miles long and over half a mile broad, an area comprising the debris of more than one city famous in the annals. In addition there are the monuments scattered around in the vicinity: eastwards, the remains which lie hidden at the top of the hill of Abba-Pantaleon; nearer to hand, the underground tomb-chambers 'of the kings Kaleb and Gabra-Maskal'; to the north the wine-presses of Ashafi, cut into the

rock; over on the west side, the sepulchre of Menelik I; and lastly, two or three miles from the city, the rock-face at Gobederah with its carved representation of a leaping lioness.

The ancient city with its deeply venerated monuments grew up on the fringe of an immense plain, clustering against the denuded slopes of two hills cleft by a valley, where the huge reservoir of Mai-Shum is still in existence. Undoubtedly the city was abundantly provided with water and encompassed by dense vegetation as a result of the irrigation works which are evident on all sides.

The ruins are very mixed. It is rather striking to find that everything appears to be of a later date than the monuments at Yeha. There is no hint of the first Sabaean occupation apart from a fragmentary inscription that has been let into the wall of Abba-Pantaleon. The one genuinely archaic site lies outside the town some seven miles or more to the south-east at Hawulta, and even there only a few relics and inscriptions have turned up. Whether or not anything older is likely to emerge from the monuments of the great Aksumite period is uncertain; nothing so far excavated suggests it. Is it possible perhaps that this metropolis, which was the seat of a vigorous and original style both in art and architecture, was founded by later immigrants? It looks very much like it.

Aksum, with its many stelae and votive thrones, was also the site of a number of temples, none of which has survived. Traces of one of these certainly still exist outside the town, beneath the much revered chapel of St. Pantaleon. Here the visitor is shown the stone on which the saintly King Kaleb used to sit when he came to see the hermit. But it is not permitted for a layman to penetrate the holy of holies in the church, where, according to the priests, there is a sunken well walled with dressed stone, with a staircase going down within. In the vicinity of the biggest sanctuary, which would have been replaced by the cathedral, there remains a group of stone thrones still used in the coronation ceremony. This long row of seats, some of which are rather damaged, were consecrated of old to the gods of the city, and are ranged side by side on stepped bases. A little to the front of them are two more thrones which were framed by square columns, probably used to support a canopy. The sacred way which led to the great stelae was likewise bordered by votive seats, the latest of which were dedicated by Ezana and bore the accounts of his triumphs inscribed on the sides. Statues must likewise have adorned the city; not the fantastic 'Egyptian' statues of Sirius as Bruce would have us believe, but colossal figures all the same, since a pedestal designed to support the immense feet of one

of these has been preserved, hewn out of a block of stone. Some fragments of bronze plaques which we found, finely riveted at the edges, might reasonably be inferred to have come from vases or from armour plating, but could also be parts of statues of medium dimensions, made in separate casts and then fitted together; there is evidence of such a technique in antiquity, as for example in an Egyptian statue of Pepi II.

But the religious monuments to be seen everywhere at Aksum are the stelae. At one time they were part of a vast architectural complex; the chief ones were grouped together in the area between the centre of the city and the valley region beyond the cistern, in the direction of the tombs of Kaleb and Gabra-Maskal. Another impressive group, now strewn upon the ground in all directions, lies to the south-west of the present town in the locality known as Gudith. There are also minor stelae standing at the south-eastern entrance to the town. These innumerable monuments are like huge needles, great slabs of stone more or less pointed at one end, undecorated and simply planted in the ground. They may be thirty, forty, or even sixty feet high. There are similar stelae at other ancient sites in Ethiopia, at Matara for instance or near Hausien; the inscriptions they bear suggest that their function was commemorative. But at Aksum these stone avenues could only have been funerary. Not a single inscription is to be found amongst them. At the base of one we found an underground tomb-chamber hewn out of the rock; a stairway of twenty-seven steps descended into a funeral chamber at some depth, but as already indicated, the vaults no longer contained anything but skeletons. There would be nothing particularly mysterious about these vast cemeteries, whose stelae are simply meant to indicate the position of the tombs and act as an offering-place for the deceased, were it not that the chief one is distinguished by the presence of some remarkable monuments appearing amongst a host of ordinary graves in the midst of a field. These are the seven stelae or 'obelisks' of giant proportions, along with a colossal stone slab enclosed by the remains of some buildings and now known as *Nefas-Mawakia*, the 'Place of the Coming Forth of the Winds', this being the spot where all the air currents of Aksum converge. This enormous stone is hewn out of the same granite as all the other monoliths round about, and measures over fifty feet in length; its weight is 200 tons. It lies now on the raised surface of the ground; originally it formed a roof to a series of galleries, being set on several rows of walls, with the outer edges of the slab resting on a line of huge overlapping upright stones; the whole structure has collapsed. How

a stone of such a size was ever transported and placed in position here, or by what means the slab came to be dressed on both sides, no one can say; the latter task seems to have been left unfinished, which would suggest that this was merely the initial stage of some monumental project, possibly a tomb with an enormous superstructure which was never completed. Excavation may tell us more of what lies below this complex structure, which is being carefully investigated.

About sixty feet in front of *Nefas-Mawakia* there seems to have been a series of steps and terraces of polished stone, with gangways and staircases at intervals. These platforms extended for about three hundred feet, and on them stood three of the giant carved stelae, ranged in order of size. To the rear of the great slab towered the biggest of the monoliths, over 100 feet high from ground level; it now lies smashed to pieces after falling and crushing the structures nearby. There were also two others, about 70 and 60 feet high respectively; the latter is still standing, but its neighbour, which was lying fallen and in a damaged condition between the walls of the modern houses, was transported not long since to Rome, underwent a skilful reconstruction, and now graces the neighbourhood of the Arch of Constantine. Strewn round about, over a considerable area, are the fragments of three further 'obelisks', gradually becoming buried in the soil as they disintegrate in the course of centuries. Lastly, just two fragments are all that remain of the seventh monolith, known as the *Stele of the Lances*.

A feature of these seven stelae is their identical decoration, either on all four sides or on three only, the sole variation being a simple adaptation to the dimensions of the monument and its relative squatness. It consists of a stylization of the architectural features of the high façade, each section treated on a broad scale and as a separate unit. At the base of the column there is a representation of a fairsized doorway, complete with bolt, in a square framework of timber; above this is a row of low windows, followed by a series of tall ones separated from one another by the ends of the beams that support each storey of the edifice. Sometimes there is an imitation open gallery at the top, crowned by a high pediment. Riveted to the top, both at the front and the back of the stele, was a metal ornament which has since disappeared, possibly in the form of the astral symbols, the crescent and disc, with the letters of an inscription. These monuments demonstrate a remarkable feeling for design and mastery of stone-work which seem to astonish present-day Aksumites even more than the stray visitor; sometimes demons are held

responsible, or they think that the ancient people possessed some secret technique for liquefying stone and that they moulded it by some process now forgotten.

At all events there is no doubt that this make-believe architecture is highly evocative of the numerous storeys, one on top of the other, piled up in ancient palaces belonging to Sabaeans or Himyarites, the source of this artistic inspiration. The sculptor seems to have wanted to express in stone the lines in which al-Hamdani describes the castle of Ghumdan:

‘Behold the great Ghumdan high and lofty
Pouring balsam on the aching heart;
Twenty stories, see it climbing
Up into heaven’s utmost part;
A turban of clouds its head encircles
Its mantle is of marble made
An alabaster girdle around it buckles . . .’

At the base of each stele, surrounding the foot of the monument, is a rectangular offering-table bordered by a leaf decoration carved in the early Hellenistic tradition, with recurring hollows shaped at the rim to give the appearance of a cup.

Finally, each stele appears to have been erected in the centre of a stepped platform of stone, which is no longer in existence, on a terrace embellished with meticulously polished limestone; around the third obelisk the supports of such a platform have been uncovered, over sixty feet in breadth and buttressed by projecting walls.

As is indicated by the presence of offering-tables, these seven monuments had a religious function; they too may have been funerary stelae, more important than the rest, belonging perhaps to royal tombs or intended for some collective cult. The fact that there were seven of them, and that they were ranged deliberately in order of size, even suggests a possible dedication to the planets. It may be that excavations will reveal descending passageways and underground tombs beneath the *Nefas-Mawukia* complex and the biggest stele close by, some kind of approach evidently having existed between the latter and the left-hand side of the large slab. The exterior of these structures has already been uncovered, but it will be necessary to excavate to some considerable depth before the really vital information is likely to be forthcoming.

In addition to this assemblage of stelae at Aksum there are also two monumental sepulchres of a very different kind, probably better described as funerary temples. One is traditionally attributed to Menelik I; its foundations, in so far as they have survived, seem to imply a square structure with bays, and a funerary crypt under the central part. The other, which is the famous tomb 'of Kings Kaleb and Gabra-Maskal', is of an impressive size; such walls as remain above ground suggest that there were two symmetrical buildings on the lines of a basilica, separated by what appears to be a platform approached by a series of steps nearly forty feet across.

It is believed that there were also some stelae in the vicinity, but there seems no longer to be any sign of these. At the front of each of the shrines, however, there is a central opening on to a narrow sloping passage leading to the underground chambers, the latter still remarkably well preserved. Under the far end of the nave of each 'basilica' there is a kind of vestibule leading to three chambers constructed of huge stone blocks. The *Book of Aksum* claims that these contained gold and pearls, but Littmann and Krencker apparently found nothing apart from three stone sarcophagi. The building on the right, which is the more complex of the two, is supposed to have been consecrated to Gabra-Maskal, and the one on the left to Kaleb. The buildings at the rear, most likely a former convent, clearly belong to a slightly later period than the sanctuaries with their supporting terrace and flight of steps. Crosses carved in the walls indicate that the place was in use during the Christian era; in fact tradition may not be far wrong in dating it to the beginning of that period. Down in the vaults the door-jambs and lintels, which are hewn from huge blocks of stone, are made to resemble a framework of square timbers—a later version of the decoration used on the 'obelisks'.

The sight of these remains, which constitute the archaeological evidence for the splendid structures of which they were once a part, makes one all the more conscious of the tremendous loss it has been that not a single building has survived in anything approaching an intact condition. All over the fields to the west of the present-day town there are pottery fragments from the great city that perished long ago. After every downfall of rain the peasants pick up bronze coins, sometimes silver ones or even gold, bearing the effigy of ancient rulers and attesting the prosperity of the city they founded. But of the buildings that once occupied the area nothing is left but a few bases of columns and pillars that have been brutally smashed to pieces. The ruination is very nearly complete, and Aksum might

well pass for a phantom city with only her stelae to astound the visitor were it not that in certain areas just enough has survived of some of the larger buildings to enable their outline to be traced to some extent.

There are local names for some of these ruins, such as Enda-Sem'on, Enda-Mikael, or Ta'akha-Maryam, the inhabitants of Aksum having thought that they must be the remains of churches. Archaeologists recognize that they are ancient palaces, which in view of their great size seems the more likely supposition. The first two measured over 120 feet along each side, with a square tower at each corner. They must have been lofty, many-storeyed fortresses with vast rooms containing rows of pillars, some square, others



[2] Reconstruction of a throne dedicated to ancient deities (after D. Krencker, *Deutsche Aksum Expedition*). The sides are covered with commemorative inscriptions like those of King Ezana, who recorded that he had dedicated such monuments after his victories.

grooved, resting on curiously truncated bases. Ta'akha-Maryam, on the other hand, was an enormous complex measuring roughly 275 by 390 feet, similarly furnished with towers linked by buildings crowned with battlements and terraces; in the centre was a huge courtyard with a square structure in the middle, raised up on a kind of staged platform.

None of this is any longer visible, of course, apart from the plan, patiently analysed by archaeologists such as Littmann and Krencker and interpreted in the light of possible parallels to be found in Yemen. These prodigious buildings must be imagined in terms of the legendary castles described by the old poets of Arabia, castles surrounded by flowers and vines, the stone walls strengthened with teak and juniper and dressed with marble and porphyry, roofs covered in bronze leaf, and statues everywhere . . .

'Flocks of birds on its roof alight
And view the world with great delight;
The spouting waters around it flow,
And quench the thirst and soothe the glow,
A slab of marble the entrance provides
Which swings wide open when the lord decides. . . .'

wrote al-Hamdani of the palace at Sana'a; why should the palaces at Aksum be inferior, particularly in view of the remarkable mastery in stone-working that is exhibited, as we have seen, by the 'obelisks'? Her ports, after all, were trading centres for luxury goods, precious commodities coming in from the Hellenistic world, Africa and the East. We ourselves found a bronze plaque covered with gold, obviously from a building. Statues, glass-ware, vases and valuable furnishings have disappeared for the most part, but not entirely; there is a terracotta vase decorated with a figure whose hair-style resembles the Egyptian type of wig or possibly a style still to be seen in certain parts of Ethiopia. Sometimes, by the greatest good fortune, knick-knacks turn up amongst fragments of that fine glass-ware imported from Egypt or Syria, a small pendant perhaps, or a finely worked gold ornament, minute pieces but invaluable as a source of information.

Lastly, there is another form of art which has come down to us quite apart from the monuments and architectural remains. The evolution of the coinage of Ethiopia, dating from the reign of King Afilas who first introduced it, serves to illustrate effectively the

ascendancy and the slow decline of Aksum. Doubtless the coins were the work of foreign craftsmen, at least to begin with, but they were quickly established on a pattern laid down by the Ethiopian rulers. A remarkable feature is the quality of workmanship which has gone into some of the representations of Endybis and Ezana, which seem as if they might be genuine portraits. The princes are depicted wearing either a crown with tall perforated points or a kind of round bonnet or cap which pulls down over the nape of the neck and which may represent a helmet of leather or some kind of metal. In addition, up to the time of the first coinage issued by Ezana, the disc and crescent were also represented, symbolizing the worship of the ancient sky deities.

Such is the art of ancient Ethiopia. Such, in particular, is the art that bears witness to the pre-eminence of Aksum. Such monuments as were found at Azbi or Yeha were faithful reproductions of the formal Sabaean prototypes. At Aksum, although no more than an approximate dating can be given, the great structures belong to the period between the second century B.C. and the introduction of Christianity into the country, during which time a new creative spirit seems to have found expression on all sides: first, a taste for the colossal allied with an engineering skill that made it possible to put up a stele weighing between four to five hundred tons; and in addition an original decorative motif transposed into the medium of stone, as used both for the 'obelisks' and the vaults of Kaleb and Gabra-Maskal, showing a remarkable feeling for line and proportion and stylizing a particular form of architecture found in the north of Ethiopia in buildings and churches both ancient and modern. The effect obtained is very pleasing. The same style recurs much later, in the twelfth century, when it reaches its fullest development in beauty of line and richness of decoration in the monolithic churches of Lalibela. There can be no doubt that this form did not originate in Sabaean art but sprang from a new, essentially Ethiopian genius possessing already the kind of artistic and technical skill most suited to this newly-developing nation.

II

ETHIOPIA IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN AND BYZANTINE ERA

WITH the aid of Frumentius and Aedesius, King Ezana and his Empire were converted to Christianity just before the middle of the fourth century. The belief that St. Matthew delivered a sermon to the Ethiopians is almost certainly founded on a myth. The story in the *Acts of the Apostles* (VIII, 26 ff.) about the conversion of the eunuch 'under Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians' has sometimes been interpreted as indicating an earlier Christianization; but the reference is to a queen of Meroë, and to a single servant at that. Now, however, a new Church makes its appearance in the Aksumite capital. The event received the blessing of Athanasius somewhere between the years 341 and 346, the dating accepted by Geez tradition, by consecrating Frumentius first bishop of Aksum, Abba Salama. Thus it was that the Egyptian patriarchal authority became established over the new community, to be responsible henceforth, for century after century, for the appointing of metropolitan bishops or *Abunas*, whether good or bad, for the investiture of the clergy, and for canonical law and articles of faith; and it was thus that Ethiopia became involved in the heretical struggle of the Monophysites in the year 451 and later.

The earliest proof of the Ethiopian conversion appears to be the dedicatory formula contained in Ezana's last triumphal inscription, which is no longer consecrated to Mahram but to the *Lord of Heaven*. This is certainly vague, and calls to mind not so much Christianity as the formulae customary amongst the inscriptions of Jewish rulers in south Arabia. No doubt it took some time for the new doctrine to be fully accepted and understood, although Ezana's coinage from now on was struck with a large cross depicted on the reverse side. The difficulty becomes apparent as soon as the attempt is made to find an appropriate title in Geez for a unique God, the need for such a designation having never before arisen. The term *Egziabeher*, or 'Lord of the Universe', was adopted, but in the translation of the *Book of Sirach*, dated to about the year 676, there appears the rather more doubtful name of *Ashtar*, who was the supreme deity of a paganism long since revoked. Nevertheless the



Christian faith appears to have replaced the cults of the Sabaeans and other immigrants without too much difficulty. The only real resistance it encountered was amongst the Agaw section of the population, some of whom were not easy to wean from the ancient cults associated with the worship of water, trees, stones, and certain idols, whilst others allied themselves fervently with the Jewish faith, which was spreading both in Ethiopia and the Yemen at this time. In the face of such resistance it fell to the monks to uphold and spread the new Gospel, their activities increasing towards the end of the fifth century. They founded churches, built inaccessible monasteries, tamed the wild beasts, and lived on bitter herbs and unripe bananas, their numbers increasing, according to traditional belief, as a result of the support of rulers such as Gabra-Maskal, and also 'Abraha and 'Asbeha, who are not mentioned in the official chronicles. Such knowledge as we have of these early hermits comes from biographies that were compiled at a later date within the monasteries which they founded, by monks endowed to a greater or lesser extent with the power of imagination. Their various accounts can hardly be said to present a coherent historical background; they are rooted in three separate traditions which it is impossible, or almost impossible, to reconcile. According to the first series there were ascetics from Byzantium, known as the *Tsadkan*, who settled in the Matara region, cutting themselves off from all human contacts and living like primitive creatures in the shelter of the ravines or upon the mountain-side. A church at Baraknaha was later dedicated to them by Gabra-Maskal. The bodies of some of these holy men have been preserved at Amba-Fokada and in a chapel quaintly perched on the steep escarpment of the rock of Matara, where they have been venerated to this day.

The second group of chronicles attributes the propagation of the Gospels in Ethiopia to certain individual monks such as Abba Yohannes, who founded the monastery of Debra-Sina, or Abba Libanos, also known as Mata'e, of Byzantine origin, who was sent to Ethiopia at the instigation of St. Pachomius, with whom he had sought sanctuary in Upper Egypt. At Guna-guna, where he lived for a time, his withdrawal from the world is commemorated by a church half-way up a cliff, perched among the euphorbias, accessible to goat rather than man; at Ham is the better-known monastery of Debra-Libanos which he founded and which in mediaeval times by reason of its rich estates was sufficiently powerful to rival the neighbouring monastic citadel of Debra-Damo for a period.

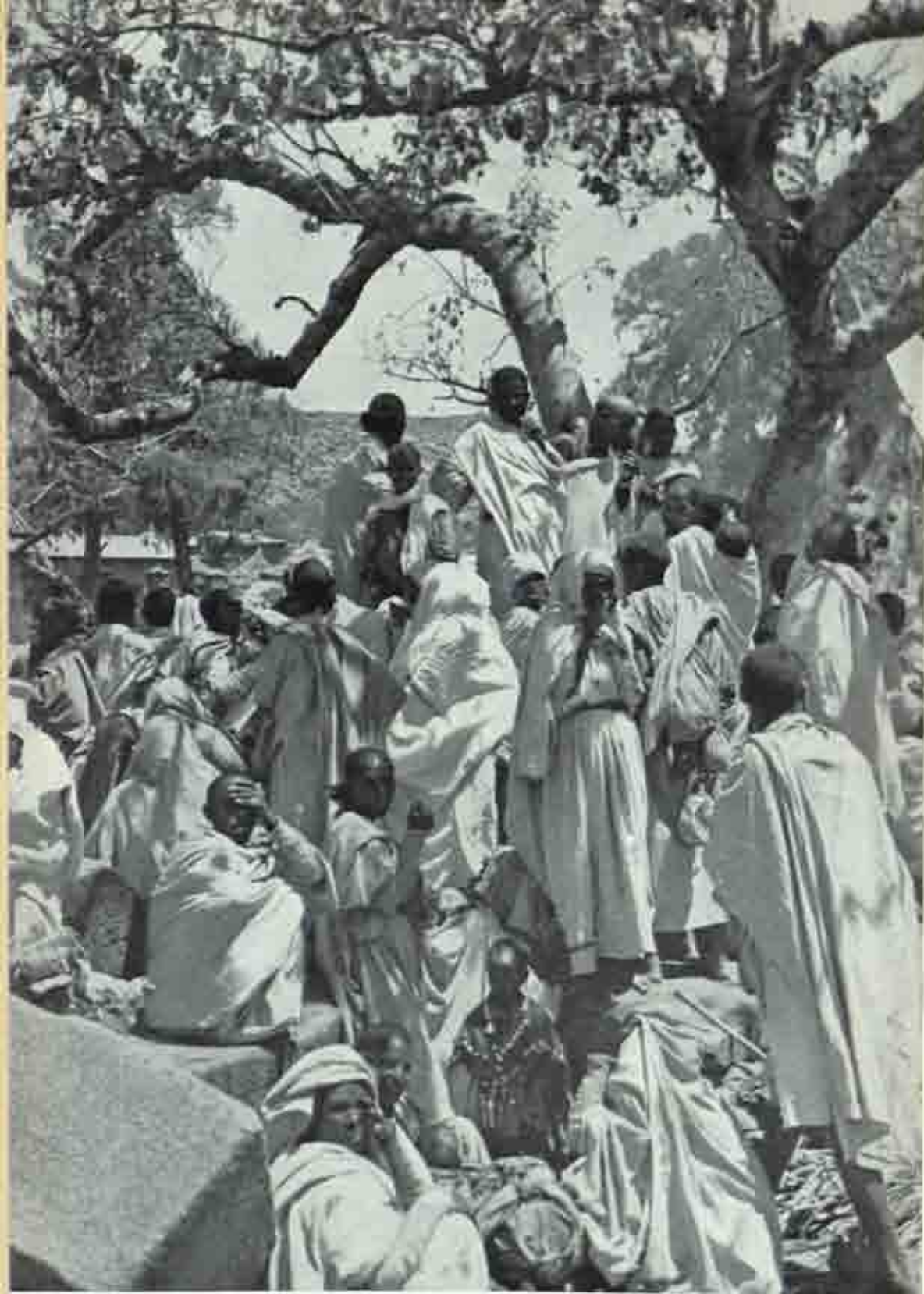
But the most important section of the literature is that which



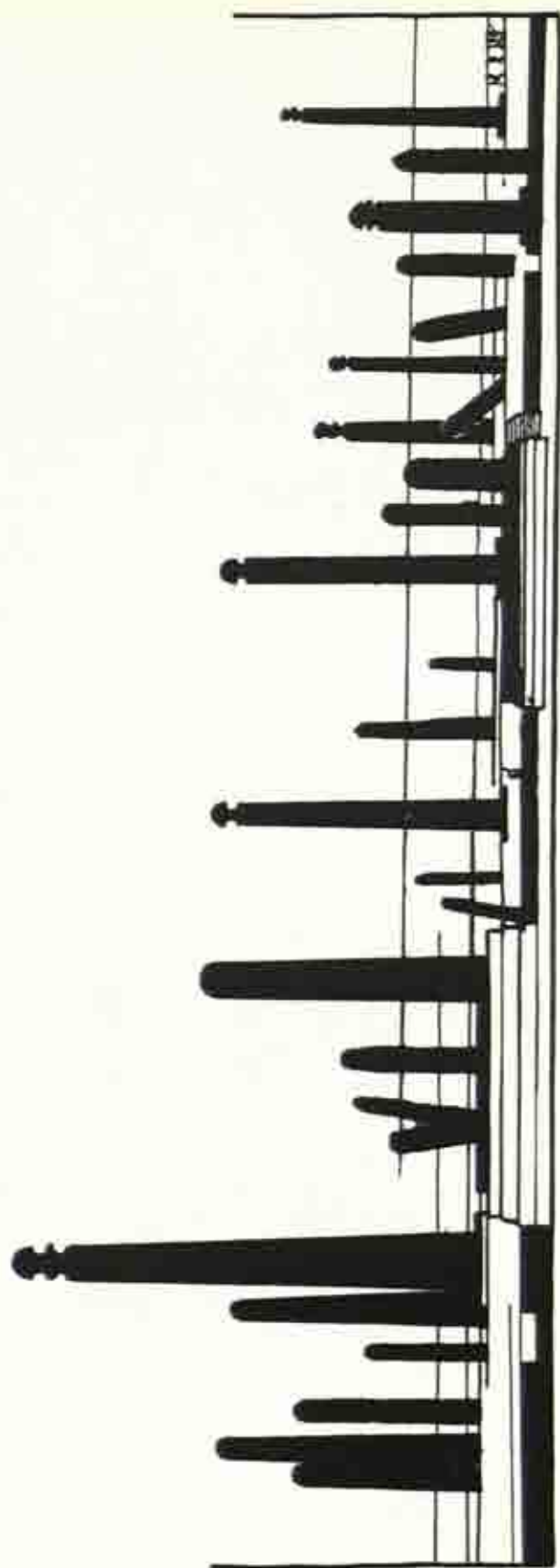
[25] Aksum: Ruined thrones that were dedicated to ancient deities. The first two, known as 'Throne of the Emperor' and 'Throne of the Bishop', are still the traditional site of the Imperial Coronation. (After Th. Lefebvre, *Voyage en Abyssinie*)



[24] Aksum: Part of the top of the 'Stele of the Lances'. This is the most damaged of Aksum's great stelae; only two portions remain. Height of above: 110 cm. (Photo J. Doresse)



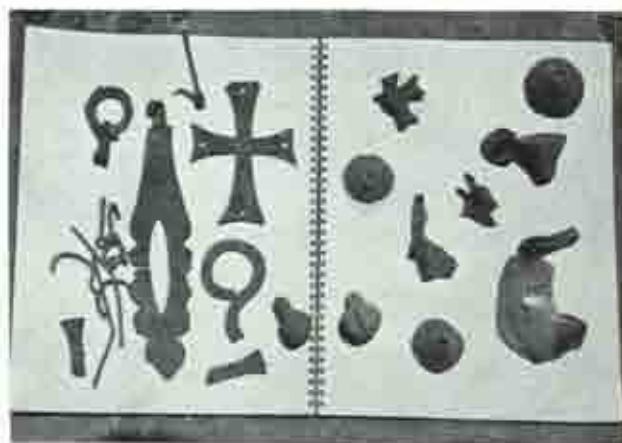
[25] Aksum: Palm Festival. A crowd of people is hastening towards the Cathedral, the holy site which has drawn similar crowds on feast days for the last two thousand years. (Photo J. Duressse)



[26] Aksum: Stelae in silhouette. Of these monolithic monuments, seven are distinctive in that they are shaped at the top and finely carved in relief, one of these measuring over one hundred feet. The rest consist of huge polished stone slabs, some of which rise to a height of over sixty feet from the ground.



[27] Aksum: Another view of the damaged top section of the 'Stele of the Lances'. Depicted on the back is an embossed leather shield. (Photo J. Dorese)



[28] In the early days of Ethiopian Christianity, Abba Afse founded a hermitage at Yeha, where one of the Sabaeen temples was converted into a church. Below it was constructed an archaic form of baptistry, which has recently been uncovered. From a crypt-like chamber nearby came fragments of glassware and bronze. These plectrums, crosses and small bells, belonging to censors and chantellers, may go back to the fifth or sixth century and are the most ancient relics of Christianity yet found in Ethiopia. (Photo J. Dorese)



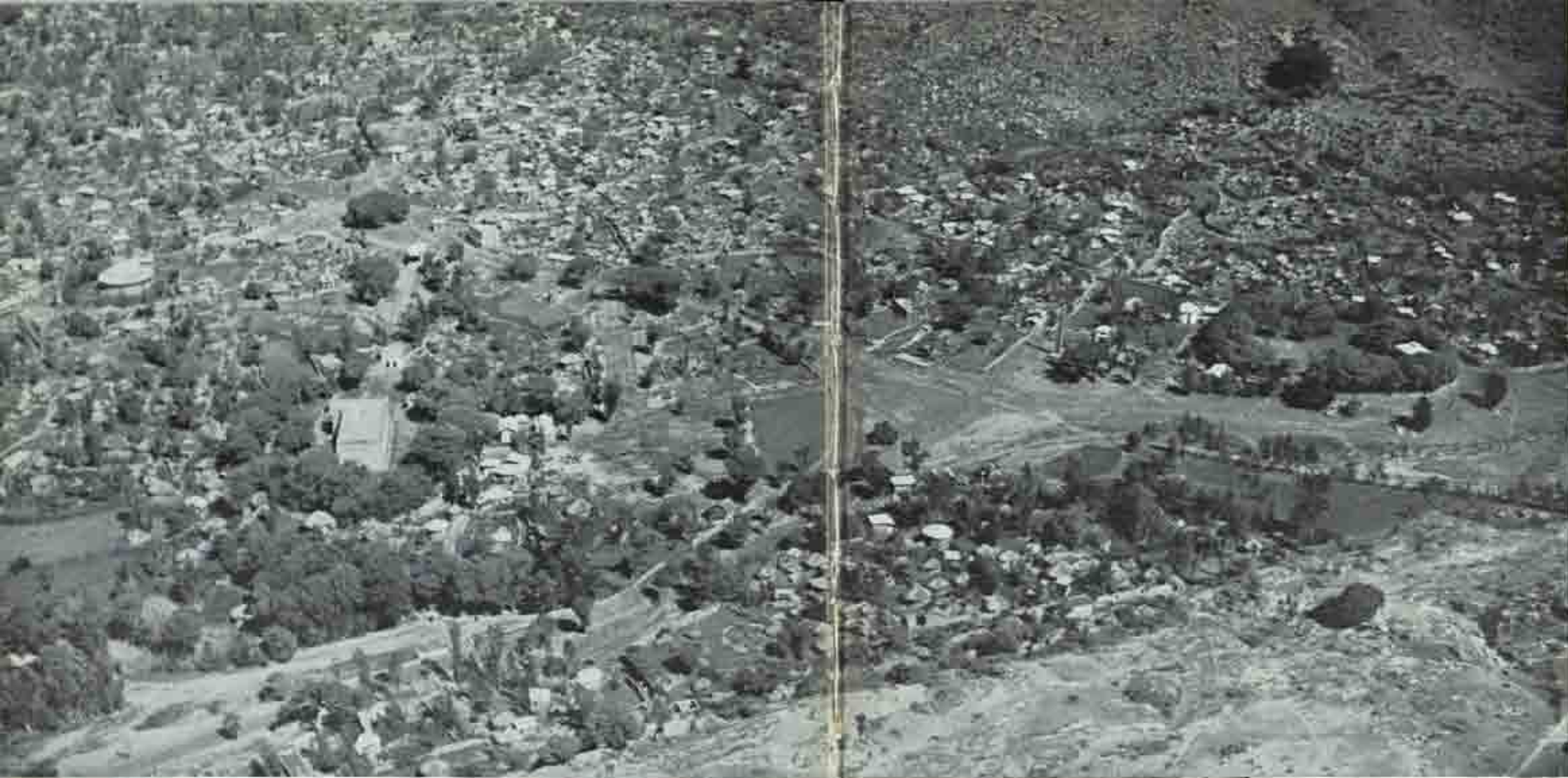
[29] Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, from a fifteenth century manuscript. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[50] Yeha: Wooden arch from the sanctuary of the old church, which was completely rebuilt some years ago. The decoration is reminiscent of the Coptic art of the fifth-seventh centuries. Other fine examples of this geometric style have been found in Tigre at Aramo, Debra-Danio, etc. (Photo J. Doresse)

[51] Aksum: Palm Festival. In the solemn procession which escorts the Cross of silver and the Gospels, there are bearers of parasols, horns, and shields, relics of bygone pomp left to the Cathedral by distinguished personages. (Photo J. Doresse)





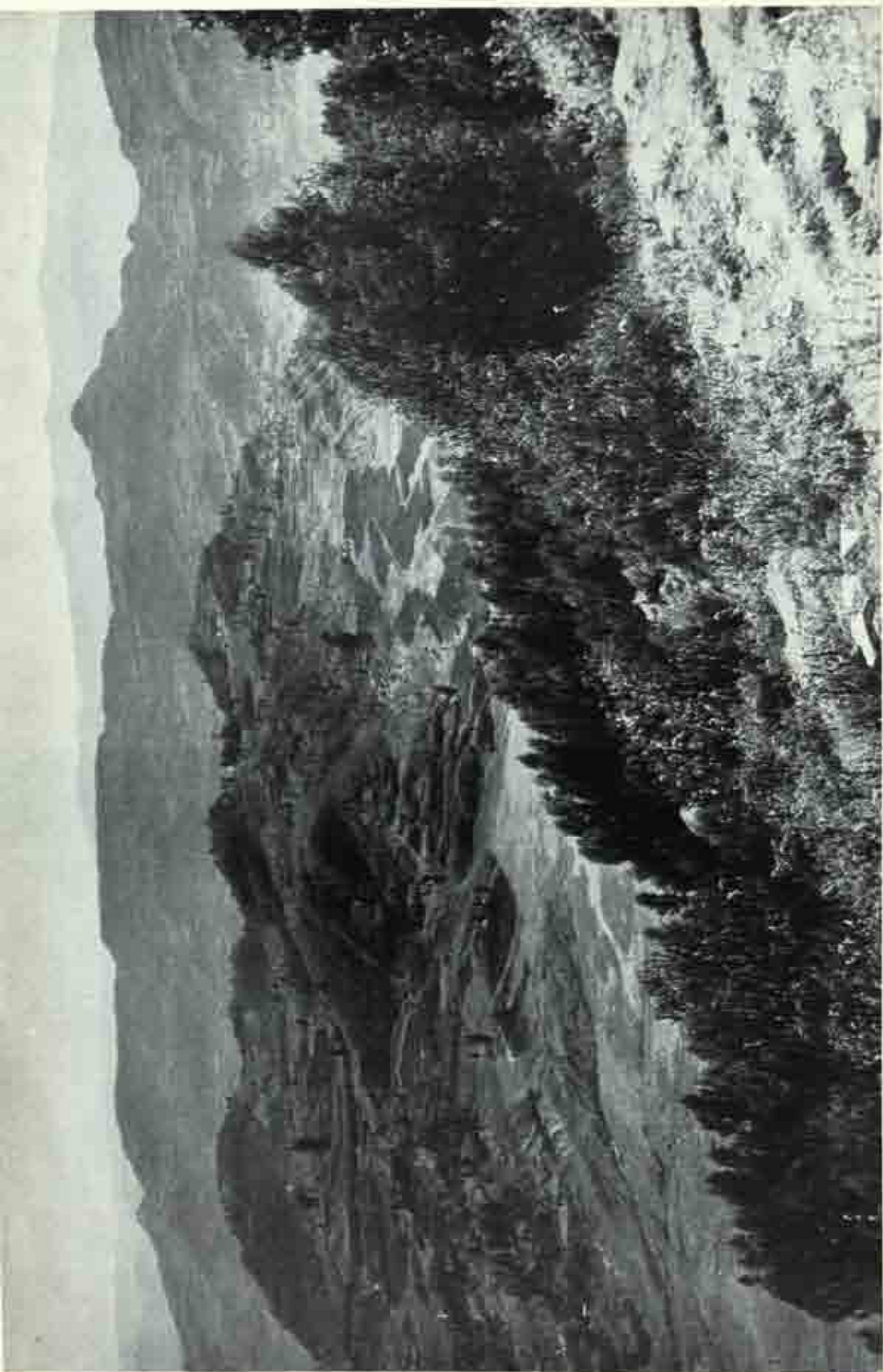
[52] The centre of Aksum; seen from the air. On the left the cathedral is clearly visible in the heart of the huge, almost circular enclosure of Dabtara, the city's ecclesiastical quarter. On the right, a ring of trees cluster together to form the precinct of the monastic church of Enda Yesus, in front of which, edging a large open space, is a line of stelae, one of which still stands to a height of sixty feet. (Photo J. Doresse)

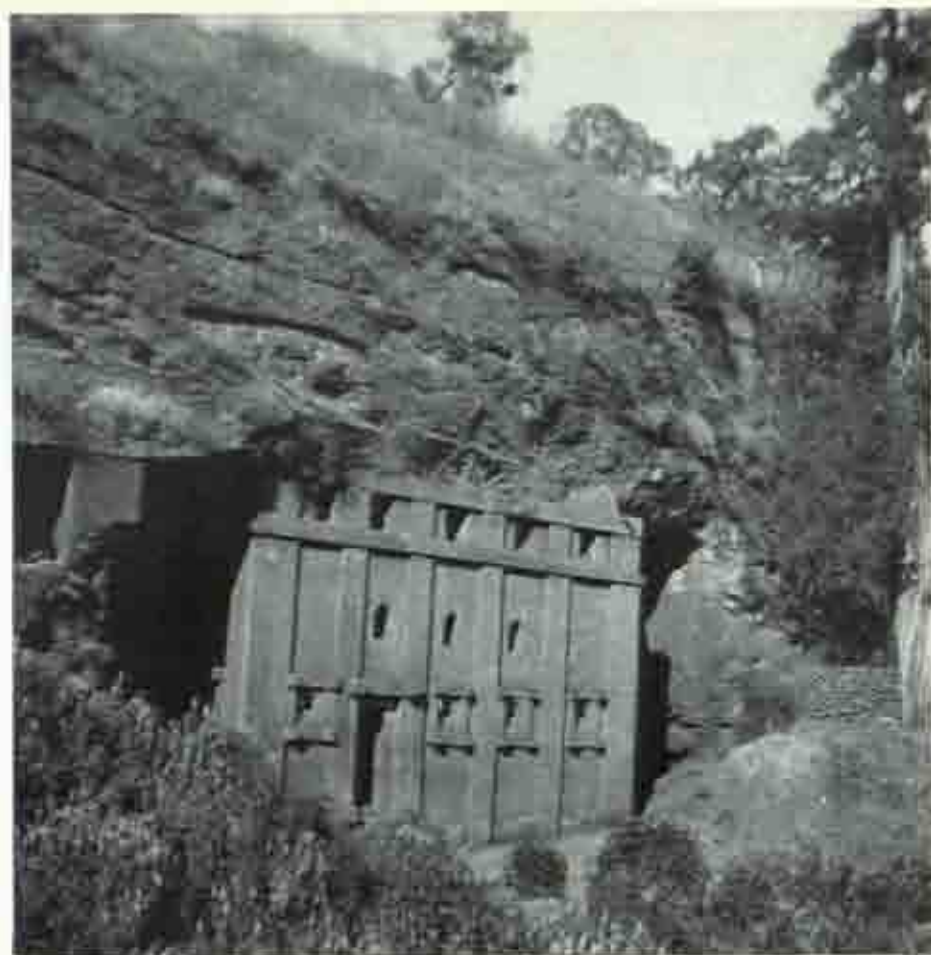


[55] In the early days of the Ethiopian Church a deacon, Yared by name, is said to have received a revelation of the chants and sacred music which are still in use today. A modern painting which is in the cathedral depicts an episode from this legend: two groups of clerics, facing each other, are performing a religious dance. (Photo J. Dorresse)



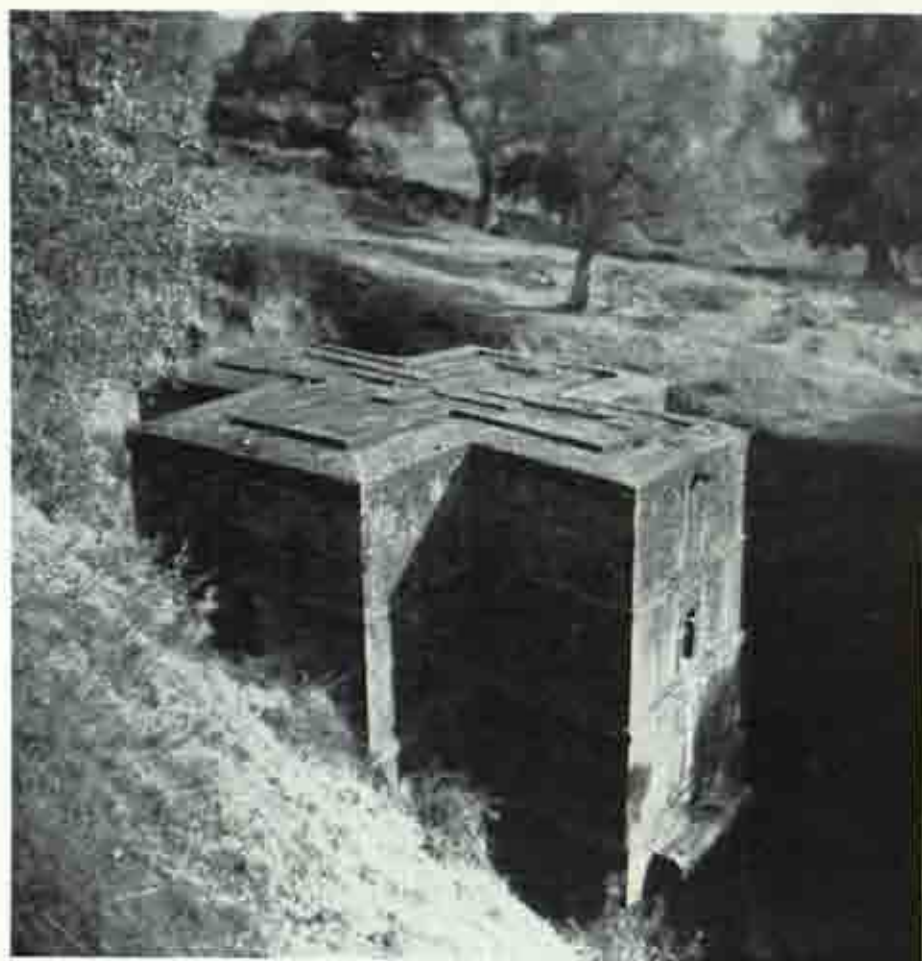
[54] . . . And here is one of the lines of chanters executing this ritual dance on the Saturday before the Palm Festival. Their coloured mantles are richly embroidered; in one hand they hold a staff with pommel of silver, and in the other a sistrum whose jingling lends rhythm to the intoning of the chant. (Photo J. Dorosso)



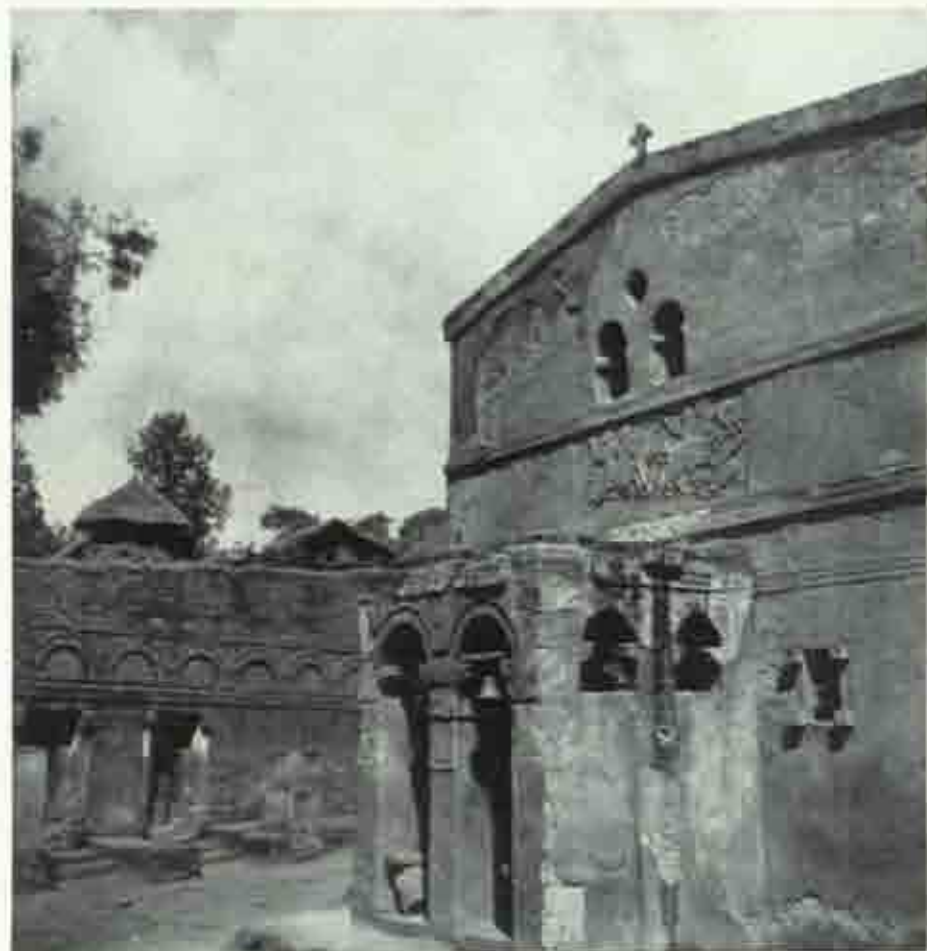


[56] Lalibela: The church of Abba Lihanos, early thirteenth century, said to have been founded by Maskal-Kebra, wife of King Lalibela. The monument is hewn out of the rock, and its door and windows conform to the pattern perfected by the ancient masons of Aksum. (Photo Roger Sauter)

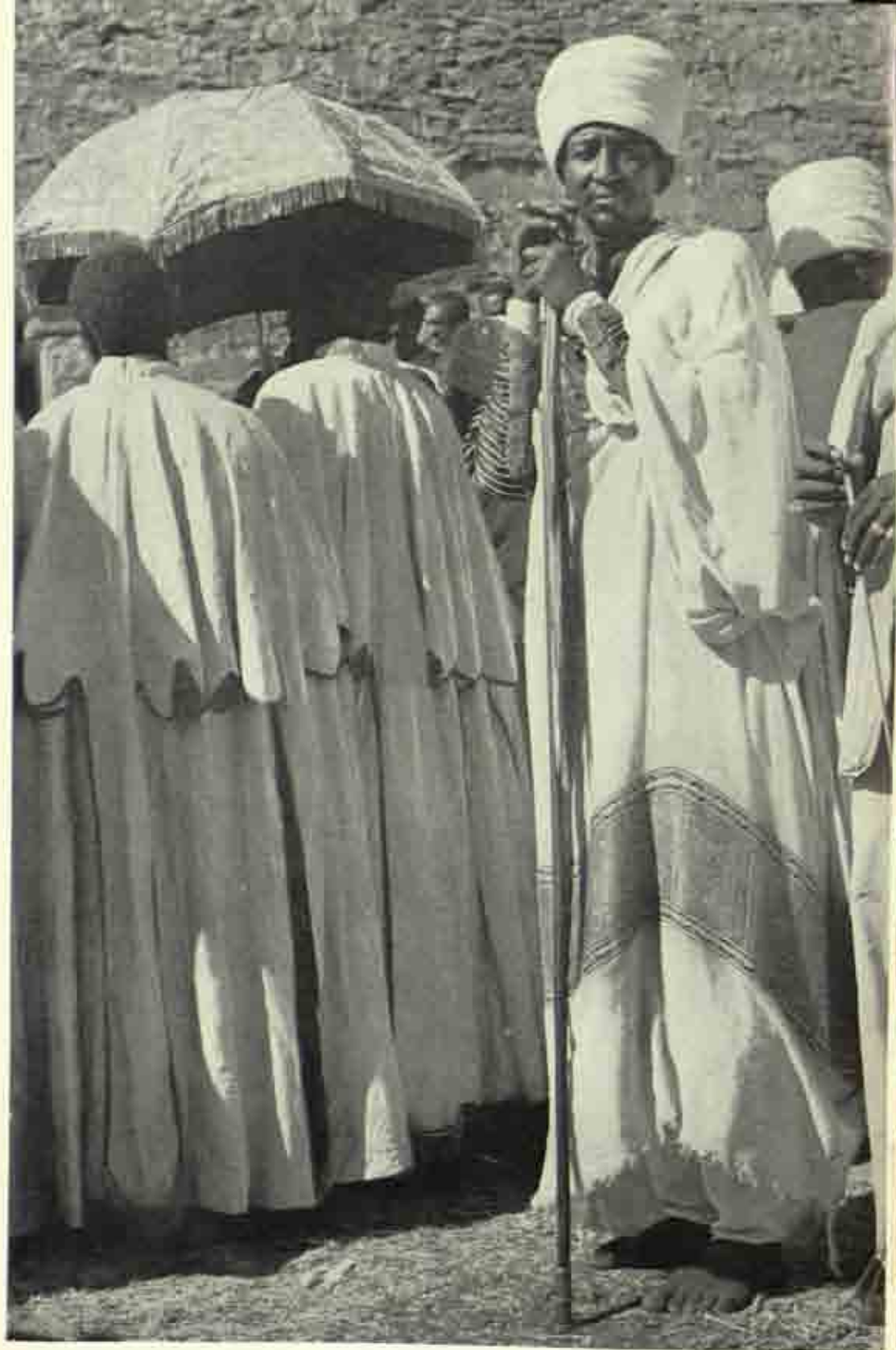
[55] Ankober. When the power of Aksum declined, a place called Kahar, according to Moslem chroniclers, replaced it as the capital of Ethiopia. This could be Ankober, which is recorded as the capital of Shoa in the eighteenth century. Situated over 8,000 feet up on the great eastern escarpments of Ambara, above 'Hat and at the upper end of the ancient tracks that lead by way of the Somali Desert from the sea, it is now little more than a somewhat forsaken village. The hills we see here were once terraced with rustic palaces, churches, and royal tombs. To the east, not far away, are the ruins of Moslem cities that were destroyed in the fourteenth century, and some of the secondary palaces of the kings of Shoa, where their treasure was kept. About nineteen miles to the west, over Alpine plateaus full of strange plants, are the cities of Debra Berhan and Teglai, once renowned. Ankober, remote from the bustling modern routes, is certainly one of the pleasantest spots in Shoa, and one of the most impressive. (Photo J. Dorese)



[57] Lalibela: Church of St. George, early thirteenth century. This is a good example of a rock-cut monolith, cruciform in plan, rising above a high stepped podium. According to tradition, the craftsmen who made these remarkable monuments came from Alexandria, but there are certain details which bear the indisputable hallmarks of Aksumite art. One might however detect a foreign influence in certain of the panelled ceiling designs, exact replicas of which are to be found in Central Asia, in the Hindu-Kush and Pamir regions. (Photo Roger Sauter)



[58] Lalibela: Church of the Virgin, and in the background the Church of the Cross, early thirteenth century. The Church of Mary is adorned with windows of the Aksumite design and carved bays in the same style as the pediments of the great stelae of the old capital. A bas-relief depicts demons being overthrown by two saints on horseback. Inside there are three naves, decorated with paintings and sculpture. (Photo Roger Sauter)



[59] Aksum: Palm Festival. A *dabtara* in devotional robes. (Photo J. Dorville)

concerns the Nine Saints, whose lives were recorded in a series of biographies written very much later in the various monasteries they founded. A feature that shows up from time to time in these accounts is the rivalry that soon began to grow up between the different monasteries, each biographer seeking to present the life and works of his spiritual father in such a way that they would outshine the rest. There is the life of Abba Afse, who founded his retreat in the old pagan temple at Yeha; Abba Pantaleon, just outside Aksum among the ruins of another ancient shrine; and Abba Garima, who settled in the highlands of Adowa. Perhaps the most picturesque account is that of Abba Za-Mikael-Aragawi, who was the founder of the famous monastery known as Debra-Damo. It is related that, having come like the others from the Theban convent of St. Pachomius, he wandered in the wilderness in the neighbourhood of Aksum and Yeha before he was able to find a sufficiently inaccessible plateau to satisfy his requirements. At the present time the only way to reach this monastic settlement, which is right at the top, is to ascend a cliff of fifty feet or more at the end of a rope, or, if one happens to be a bishop, to have oneself hoisted up in a most uncomfortable iron cage. Aragawi, who was better favoured, had the assistance of a miraculous serpent of gigantic proportions, which stretched out its tail to him from the top of the mountain.

The precise origins of this monasticism, founded amid the northern wastes of Ethiopia by a number of different saints and taking so many different forms, are difficult to determine. There are certain elements which might be Syrian, although allusions by the monks themselves to their earliest predecessors are usually to the great names amongst the Egyptian anchorites: Pachomius, Macarius, Anthony, Jean Colobos, Shenuti and Pisentios. But it is difficult to come to any conclusion without a rather more systematic study of the history of the Egyptian monasteries than has yet been made.

Even before the monasteries were founded the Christian Church of Ethiopia must have had to adopt a liturgy and a form of ceremonial chant which, once taken over, soon became part of a strongly native idiom. A particular source of inspiration may well have been the patriarchal liturgies of Alexandria and the usage of the Church of Egypt, since the Greek form of service was retained for some considerable time. But the chanting, accompanied by sistra, drums, and slow sacred dances, acquired an unorthodox character; and the invention of these new musical forms was attributed to a deacon called Yared who is said to have lived during the reign of Gabra-

Maskal. The story goes that he was transported to heaven where he received the revelation of the three tones which he introduced into the Ethiopian hymnal or *Deggwa*. The oldest editions still in fact extant from this compilation are revisions of fifteenth century date.

In addition the Church of Ethiopia had the benefit from the first of its own literature in Geez, a language derived from Sabaeen and enriched from Greek, containing in addition many Syriac and Hebrew words. Between the fifth and seventh centuries the Old and New Testaments were gradually translated, not from the Alexandrian Greek texts but from those of Antioch. Holy works on ecclesiastical law were also translated, as well as a number of apocrypha such as *The Ascension of Isaiah* and a collection of theological writings under the name of Cyrillo of Alexandria, the *Qerillos*. A single monastic text by St. Pachomius, entitled *Statute*, was translated, and also an educational treatise, *Physiologus*, containing descriptions of animals, plants, and stones of various kinds.

Most important of all, the churches increased in number. There is little doubt that the sacred objects and furnishings they contained, whether they were imported or manufactured locally, were richly embellished with all that the wealth of the Aksumite Empire could well expend. All trace of that world of splendour has been swept away in the course of one devastation after another. The earliest remains come from Yeha, where a church was founded within the walls of the old temple. A baptistry, rather like those to be found in old Egyptian churches, had been dug at the far end of the sanctuary, and from a crypt situated under the pavement various objects associated with Christian worship have been recovered in a damaged condition: bronze crosses, small bells belonging to censers, and fragments of chandeliers. In the case of churches whose construction dates to more than one period, there was no difficulty in adapting the basilica form, which was traditional in the Nile Valley and in Syria, while retaining the characteristics of Aksumite buildings of a similar type. The remains of such structures are still visible at Adulis, on the Kohaito plateau, and at Toconda; they have a podium, and are divided into three naves by rows of square columns. In the cathedral at Aksum, and again in a later church at Lalibela, there are five naves side by side. A rectangular type of church was thus evolved, in its latest stages being built without foundations like those still constructed in Tigre at the present day. Two of the earliest examples are the ancient church at Asmara and the one that was built beside the temple at Yeha, neither of which

has survived. In order to get a clearer idea of these ancient sanctuaries it is useful to go and see the chapel of Abba-Licanos near Aksum or the one belonging to the Debra-Libanos at Ham. But the finest example is the church of Debra-Damo, which has retained some of the architectural features of old Aksum in its wall-structure with the characteristic series of bays and projecting timbers, its doors and windows with the same timbered framework that was stylized in the stonework of the giant stelae. Some of the decorative motifs appear to suggest the influence of Coptic Egypt or of Syria: rows of wooden arches carved in a meander pattern, as in churches at Aramo or Yeha; clerestoreys with geometrically-shaped openings, and adjoining small arches in characteristic Aksumite style; and last but not least, animal figures, which occur for example at Bihat on the pillars of the old church, at Guna-guna on an ancient swing-door, and in particular at Debra-Damo on the panelled ceiling, which owes much of its beauty to the late mediaeval Coptic wood which it incorporates. Ivories, lamp-fittings of bronze and censers of silver, hangings and paintings of great renown, all that once adorned these interiors have long since disappeared in the course of centuries of disruption, and it is left to the imagination to reconstruct the picture with the aid of a few sidelights from Syrian or Coptic archaeological material.

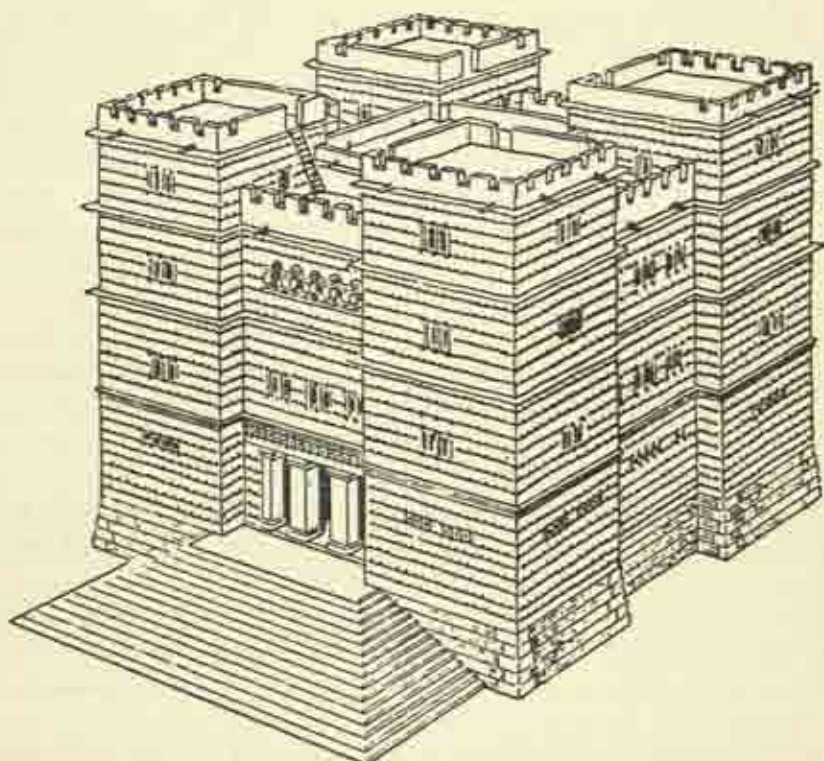
Early Ethiopian Christianity had to borrow extensively from foreign sources in inaugurating a traditional ceremonial, organized monasteries, sacred music, ecclesiastical architecture and decorative design; but out of all these influences there emerged an integrated system whose pattern was distinctively Ethiopian.

The era which opened with the conversion of Ezana thus held out the promise of a remarkable development within the Aksumite Empire. From this period dates the beginning of her strong and independent political existence. Yet it was to break down all too soon in the face of overpowering events and forces superior to those of the entire Byzantine world, with the Persian occupation of Arabia, the growth of Islam, and the invasions of the Beja. . . .

The kings who witnessed the splendour of the Aksumite Empire and its sudden downfall are known from their coinage. After Ezana appears Wazeb II, whose effigy on large bronze coins has a carefully gilded background; then comes Eon, with inscriptions in Greek so full of mistakes that it seems reasonable to infer that the new national language had already effectively replaced all others. Alamiysis and Wasas prepare the way for Kaleb, the legendary conqueror, who is shown in profile wearing a crown and holding the

sceptre surmounted by a cross. His son Israel and after him Mahi-wys, Yoel and Armah are shown in crude effigies that indicate the onset of decadence, and with Ghersem and Hataz there appear to be only the rough copies of effigies portrayed on Byzantine coins of the seventh century. The names of Gabra-Maskal, 'Abraha and 'Asbeha are missing; there is an abundance of legend about these rulers, but it is possible that although they may certainly have existed, they may have had a number of different titles, and the official one chosen for the coinage may not have been the one most familiar to the people as a whole.

Aksum, then, at the beginning of this succession, was at the zenith of its powers. According to Byzantine authors Ethiopia was



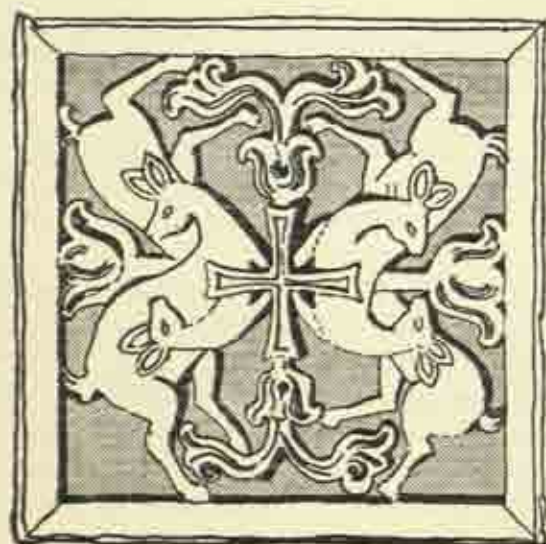
[4] Aksum: Enda-Mikael. Tentative reconstruction by D. Krencker (*Deutsche Arum Expedition*) of one of the smallest of Aksum's palaces. To get a better idea of these structures one needs to bear in mind what the palaces of Babylon, Assur, or Khorsabad were like. The influence of such styles readily filtered into Southern Arabia, which was linked with the Persian Gulf by the never-ending caravans, and thence into Ethiopia. One of the more characteristic features must have been the "unicorns" which travellers reported seeing high up on the towers of Aksum, and which, there seems no doubt, bore a resemblance to the strange animal figures depicted on the Gate of Ishtar at Babylon.

at that time in relations with Constantinople, Iran, India, and Ceylon. Her ambassadors were held in such esteem that in Persia they succeeded in securing the release of a bishop who had been imprisoned. She traded by way of the Red Sea and by the great caravan routes that went up to Egypt or north from the Yemen towards Mesopotamia. One of her chief exports consisted of emeralds from the distant regions inhabited by her allies the Blemmyes, not far from the cataracts of the Nile. She sent expeditions out from Adulis on journeys of fifty days to seek spices, incense and cassia. Every second year a caravan was sent to the Agao who inhabited the Sasu region the other side of Lake Tana, taking cattle, iron and salt in exchange for gold. The towns were overwhelmed with commerce, swarming with merchants of every nationality, Greeks, Syrians, Indians, Persians, and Armenians, and graced with magnificent churches and monuments. In the year 525 the Byzantine traveller Cosmas gazed upon the palace of Aksum with its four corners set with towers surmounted by four statues in the form of unicorns, and marvelled at the tame giraffes and elephants kept in the enclosure. Not long afterwards an ambassador on his way to the capital was startled near Yeha by the spectacle of a herd of elephants which he numbered at five thousand. To Jean Malalas we owe a superb portrait of the king: a linen cloth interlaced with gold was wrapped about his loins; a short tunic hung floating from his shoulders, ornamented with pearls and precious stones arranged in rosettes; upon his head he wore a cloth of linen, interwoven with gold, in the form of a turban, with four gold ornaments suspended from each side; while a golden chain served as a necklace. The monarch was seated upon a high four-wheeled chariot drawn by a team of elephants, and in his hands he held two javelins and a buckler of gold. . . .

An unfailing indication of political events taking place during this period of splendour is, as always, the extent of the king's activities in the Yemen, which once again had assumed a position of independence. But from now on such interventions were to have a religious as well as a political basis. Christian communities were also beginning to grow up in Southern Arabia. This was due in part to the ambassador of Theophilus Indus, who, having been sent by the Emperor Constantius II, instigated the establishment of three churches, one of which was at Aden and another at Zafar. But at the same time the Sabaeen territory was witnessing the propagation of a particularly fanatical form of Judaism which was soon to become a deadly rival of Christian evangelism.

Thus it was that the Aksumite army at the time of the visit of Cosmas came to take up arms against a ruler who had been converted to the Jewish faith. The purpose of the campaign was to punish the king of Sana'a and avenge the Christians he had persecuted. It appears to have been a major expedition, for which Roman and Persian vessels would have been used along with the Ethiopian fleet for the transport of troops. The guilty king was killed and cut to pieces. But the numerous texts dealing with the campaign are somewhat confused in parts, owing to a fair admixture of legend with facts. Procopius calls the Aksumite king by the name of *Ellesthaios*, which resembles Ella-Asbeha, one of the titles of King Kaleb. The Syriac *Book of the Himyarites* goes into detail about the reasons for the campaign, mentioning the massacre of Ethiopian soldiers after the firing of the cathedral of Zafar, and the bloody persecutions of Christians in the town of Nagran about the year 525. The Arab historians, for their part, in later writings, give the name of the persecutory monarch as Dhu-Nuwas, who is identified in his own authentic historical inscriptions—which still exist—as Yusef-As'a.

A bitter price had to be paid for this victory. Kaleb appointed one of his governors, 'Abreha by name, to act as viceroy over the land now under his control, but the latter deserted almost immediately. The Emperor endeavoured to recall him to duty by sending armed forces on more than one occasion, but the expeditions were in vain; in fact the troops he sent, far from engaging in battle, proceeded to



[5] The Monastery of Debra-Damo has one of the oldest churches in Ethiopia, of a type which connects it with the monuments of Aksum. It has a panelled ceiling decorated in a variety of motifs; one of the finest of these panels is reproduced here. (Seventeenth century.) (After *Deutsche Aram Expedition*)

settle down and enjoy themselves in this inviting countryside. This was in the year 527, and the main interest of these campaigns lay in the heroic episodes that went with them, such as the extraordinary combat between 'Abreha and the Aksumite general Ariat, whom he slew by a treacherous device.

The prestige of Aksum does not however appear to have been undermined by these events; the Aksumite régime was regarded by the Byzantine world as one of the champions of Christianity. Thus Justinian sent an envoy to Ethiopia requesting assistance against the Persians; at first this took the form of withholding the economic benefits hitherto available to them from the silk trade, while guaranteeing control of the latter and diverting it by way of the Red Sea; later, it became a matter of invading Persia. The king of Aksum agreed to undertake the sending of an expeditionary force, but did not enter wholeheartedly into the project. In the meantime important events were taking place in Southern Arabia. 'Abreha, who had effected a reconciliation with Kaleb's successor, was ruling under the title of 'King of the Aguezat'. He put down the revolts of vassal states, repaired the irrigation works of Mareb, and received ambassadors from Byzantium, from Persia, and even from his ex-sovereign. More important still, he built a vast cathedral at Sana'a, not only in order to meet the requirements of an influx of Christians—Monophysites from Hira having fled from Byzantine persecution and settled in the neighbourhood—but also to provide the whole of Arabia with a place of pilgrimage. It was this last undertaking which led to the traditional Moslem belief as stated in the Koran that an expeditionary force was sent by 'Abreha somewhere about the year 540 to attack the shrine at Mecca, which was still pagan at this time. There would have been no trouble over these various activities if 'Abreha had not also taken up a hostile attitude in regard to Persia, where from now on his enemies sought help and protection; as it was, the downfall of South Arabia was not long in coming. It came, in fact, about the year 572, when an onslaught by the Arabs in the north of the Yemen allowed a Persian fleet to penetrate by way of Aden and thus occupy the country without the use of force. This was a severe blow to the Byzantine Empire and served to precipitate the incipient rift between Justinian II and Chosroës. But Arabia was completely lost; the Persians continued to advance and by 602 the entire peninsula was occupied. It was another thirty years before they retreated before the Moslem conquest, and the Yemen, where the great Mareb dam to which the country owed its fertility was destroyed, never to be restored, was

never again to enjoy its former prosperity. Arabia was lost, irrevocably lost to Ethiopia.

Already the Persian fleets from the Yemenite ports were marauding those on the opposite shores. Suddenly the Aksumite Empire found itself deprived not only of its territory oversea but also of its commercial outlets, for the merchant ships were unable to pass beyond the Bab-el-Mandeb.

With the crippling of her seaports Ethiopia hoped perhaps to survive by developing other trade-routes. But fate, once again, was pitiless. The growth of Islam, in cutting Egypt off from the Byzantine world some decades previously, had also gradually brought about the isolation of Ethiopia from all Mediterranean contact. It is true there were neighbouring Christian states in Nubia, where the Nobads, Makorrites and Alodes had been converted between the years 540 and 580. But Ethiopia had never been on particularly friendly terms with these races. Her allies until now had been the Blemmyes, who inhabited the Red Sea deserts as far up as the Egyptian frontiers. Now she found herself suddenly deprived in this direction also, the Nubian king Silco having defeated and annihilated them about the middle of the sixth century. This extensive desert region, hitherto always a reliable source of assistance, now began to swarm with a new set of invaders, the Beja, who, not content with severing the last links between Aksum and the north, began raiding the Eritrean plateau and settling there towards the end of the seventh century.

The only relations now open to Ethiopia were therefore with Islam, still in its infancy. At first all went well. In the year 615 certain companions of Mohammed fleeing from the persecutions of the Quraishites took refuge at the court of Aksum, the Prophet having told them: 'If you go into Abyssinia, you will find there a king under whom no man is persecuted. It is a land of justice, where God will bring you rest from your afflictions. . . .' The strangers were indeed made welcome, and they afterwards returned to Arabia filled with wonder at the beauty of the Ethiopian churches.

Later, however, things began to deteriorate. The spirit of goodwill was somewhat undermined by a series of raiding attacks carried out from Aksumite ports against the Arab bases on the opposite bank, the Ethiopian authorities taking no action against the offenders. Skirmishes occurred in the years 650 and 640, and in 702 a heavy assault was made on Jedda. In spite of the divine injunction to Mohammed never to enter into any kind of dispute with the Ethiopians 'for it has fallen to them to receive nine-tenths of the

courage of mankind', the Moslems had no option but to take reprisals on the pirate lairs. They captured Massawa and the Dahlak Islands, subsequently sacking and setting fire to Adulis, a disaster from which the latter never fully recovered. Other ports were similarly destroyed; the Aksumites were finally driven from the coastal areas and reduced to a political nonentity. And so it came about that an eighth century Caliph was able to add to his portrait gallery at the palace of Qusair-Amrah, as a companion to the rulers of Spain, Byzantium, and Persia, a representation of the Negus of Ethiopia. These were the four leaders of the world and he could truly boast that they were at his feet.

It was probably at about this time that Aksum ceased to manufacture a coinage that was no longer worth anything. In barely more than a hundred years her Empire had passed from prosperity and untold power to a state of desolation, and Ethiopia found herself suddenly isolated from the Christian world, from a civilized world of which she had become an integral part after centuries of firm progress in domestic and foreign affairs as an independent power. Was she to lapse into oblivion henceforth? Certainly not. With the waning of her power Aksum had imparted to the Christian world, albeit unwittingly, a curious concept of redemption which was to find expression in the legend of Prester John. Amongst the Moslems and Christians in the world about her it was whispered that a day would come when Ethiopia the indomitable would arise and destroy Mecca. In the words of the Psalmist, she would *stretch out her hands to God*, and deliver the world. This belief was no doubt fostered by Byzantine literature in the form of apocryphal prophecies dating to the seventh and eighth centuries, but found its best expression in two later Coptic writings known as the 'Apocalypses'. These, which are attributed to two illustrious monks, Pisentios of Thebes and Samuel of Qalamun, announced to suffering Christians everywhere that the Emperor of Ethiopia would one day once again unite with the Emperor of Rome and that together they would vanquish Islam. This pious hope inspired the later belief in the existence of Prester John, a belief which spurred on many travellers to venture in search of this fabulous king and eventually, at the dawn of the sixteenth century, to discover as if by the hand of destiny the road that led to Ethiopia.

III

FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY: HISTORY IN SHADOW

ETHIOPIA was now cut off from the world. The life before her was one of austerity, isolation, and piety; and she turned to a kind of inward contemplation, notwithstanding the internal struggles that from time to time disrupted the life of the community. Perhaps it was this prolonged period of pious meditation which enabled her to build a civilization so distinctively her own. The people of Ethiopia have never been afraid of silence or solitude, the spiritual retreat so often sought by their religious and political leaders.

There were a number of stages in this lengthy period of evolution. First, the gradual ebbing of resources, a kind of progressive anaemia taking hold of Aksum; then a period of stabilization, both manpower and the produce obtainable from the Ethiopian plateau being sufficiently plentiful for the Empire to gather new strength. There was a general move away from the plateaus of Tigre, which were not particularly fertile and whose main virtue had been their nearness to the coastal area, now hostile. The focal point now became the centre of the mountainous provinces, hitherto something of a backwater, but rich in potentialities. After a brilliant but short-lived comeback at Lasta, the people of Amhara, Shoa and Gojjam eventually joined in the task of restoring the old traditions, effecting a general renaissance in art and literature, and re-establishing territorial unity within Ethiopia; and they directed their efforts towards the recovery of the Empire.

But about events during the darkest phase very little is yet known. There appears to have been skirmishing with Nubia towards the end of the seventh century, incurring the displeasure of the Patriarch at Alexandria, who liked his distant provinces to be on peaceful terms with one another. After this there is an almost complete silence with no known historical events and no sign of literary activity. There seems to have been a shift of operations towards the uplands of the south, possibly as a result of intensive efforts at development. In the north the kingdom was continually under pressure from the Beja, whose infiltration became particularly troublesome in the ninth century. According to the Arab historian Yaqubi, the latter had already by this time established, in

the region between Asswan and Ethiopia, the kingdoms of Naqiq, Baklin, Bazen, Giarin, and Kata'ah. These invaders left their trace in the legends and poetry of Northern Ethiopia, where one of their tribes, the Rum, was particularly famous. After some time in power this tribe was suddenly blotted out as a result, it is believed, of disobedience to God, who caused them to be swallowed up in the bowels of the earth. But for a legacy there are some curious tombs built by these people and, in the songs of those who knew them, a picture of their vanished opulence: 'There are fine treasures in the Mareb River: four vases of gold and eight feet of the river-bed, on the left-hand side in a grotto'.

It is therefore likely that in the face of this pressure Aksum would by this time have been abandoned as the seat of government in favour of the Shoa district; no further royal inscription of any importance occurs there, and Yaqubi gives the name of Kabar as the capital in the year 872. This city, which is something of a mystery, is also mentioned later by Masudi, who mentions in addition maritime traffic between the Yemen and Ethiopia, utilizing the ports of Dahlak, Zaila and Batse. Other details indicate that the Ethiopian state now occupied the Awash region, near the Gimma and Wanshet rivers and the high-lying Omo valley. The fourteenth century writers Ibn-al-Wardi and Ibn-Khaldun also refer to Kabar rather more explicitly, the latter placing it to the east of Damot. They maintain that this city, which can be reached by way of Zaila, is almost certainly Ankober, which lies on the eastern slopes of the plateau and was later recaptured by the people of Shoa, who made it their capital. Other rather less reliable sources contain references to a transfer of the Ethiopian nucleus into the region of Amhara and Shoa. According to some accounts it was about the year 627 that the monastery of Debra-Egziabeher was founded on the shores of Lake Haik. In 850 one of the kings of legend, Del-Naod, was responsible for the building of the monastery of St. Stephen on one of the islands on this lake, endowing it on a lavish scale and throwing it open to three hundred clergy from Aksum. Close by he built himself a palace. The remains of early constructions with simple carvings have in fact been found in this vicinity. In all likelihood there were also sanctuaries set up in the region of Lake Tana, at Imraha, and on the edge of the extinct crater of Mount Zuquala. The *Life of Takla-Haymanot*, who was a thirteenth-century monk, refers to the activities of certain ancestors who settled in the Dawunt district in the seventh century, or who spread the Gospel in Walaka, Biet-Amhara, Merabieti and the Menz plateau.

Most of all this is unauthenticated. There is however rather more reliable historical evidence bound up with the sporadic correspondence of higher officials of the clergy appointed by the Patriarch at Cairo. A single example is perhaps worth quoting. Under the Patriarch Cosmas (921-935) it became necessary for a bishop, Petros by name, to intervene in the matter of a successor to the Emperor who had just died. Two Coptic monks from the Egyptian convent of St. Anthony succeeded by means of a hoax in reversing the decision made by Petros, and one of them, using forged documents, managed to get himself recognized as *Abuna*. In Egypt the facts were not known until considerably later, at which point the Patriarch proceeded to excommunicate all concerned, refraining for a very long time from exposing any more archbishops to the hazards of Ethiopia. Before all this happened the country had been reasonably prosperous; now it was suddenly overwhelmed by calamity: a queen of the Agaw, who was the ruler of a Jewish sect in the Damot region, began burning down the churches, laying waste the land, and driving the king out of one place after another; the latter, taking it as a sign of divine wrath at what had befallen the *Abuna* Petros, being obliged to appeal to the Patriarch for help and the appointment of a new bishop. With the arrival of the latter, so the story goes, the trouble stopped; but there remained the brutal legacy of the queen, who among other things had reduced Aksum to rubble, leaving only the huge monoliths which she was unable to demolish. Her memory is preserved under the names *Gudit*, 'The Prodigious One', and *'Esat*, 'The Monster'.

In the course of these dark ages Islam, on the periphery of Ethiopia, was gradually closing in, occupying Suakim, subduing the hirsute Beja tribes of the Baraka region, and settling to the east of Shoa in the fertile uplands of 'Ifat. Linked with this territorial expansion there was another kind of pressure, equally insistent, from the Moslems in control at Cairo who in order to spread Islamic doctrine made use, as for example when Badr-el-Gamali was vizier, of obliging Coptic bishops on their official visits to Ethiopia. In the year 1080 seven mosques erected at the bishop's instigation were destroyed by the Emperor, who in righteous indignation imprisoned the *Abuna* forthwith. To this account one might perhaps add that it was during this period that there grew up in Egypt the belief that the Negus could bring famine to her land if he so wished, simply by diverting the waters of the Nile; after which there is little further to add about these enigmatic unrecorded centuries.

IV

THE ZAGWE DYNASTY AND THE CHURCHES OF LALIBELA

THUS in the regions of Lasta, Amhara, and Shoa, and even further south, a new Ethiopia began to blossom, emerging as a coherent entity seemingly without warning, complete with a dynasty, an organized community life, and a developed art from the twelfth century onwards. 'Now it came to pass that the kingdom passed to another people who were not of the tribe of Israel. These people were called the Zagwe. . . .' is the account of one of the chronicles, which says that the reigns of this new line of princes totalled 330 years. This estimation would imply that the dynasty began immediately after the devastation caused by Queen *Gudit* in the middle of the tenth century. Other traditions however would put it about the middle of the twelfth century, and the dates 1135-1137 are in fact the most likely. It was at about this time, as it so happens, that an Ethiopian ruler demanded the dismissal by the authorities in Cairo of a bishop named Habib on the grounds that he was too old for office, the truth being that the *Abuna* had in fact refused to recognize the ruler in question because the latter was a usurper!

The new dynasty, whose claim to succession was based on a legendary marriage with a daughter of one of the last rulers of Aksum, Delna'ad, or Armah, by name, remained nevertheless in power and was eventually recognized by the Church. This royal line was of ancient Agaw blood, originating in the district of Bugna, with the result that the seat of government was removed to the heart of the Lasta mountains, a high and almost inaccessible region. It appears that the kings maintained close connexions with certain sanctuaries in the north of Ethiopia which provided active support; Queen Maskal-Kebra, who was the wife of Lalibela, bore the title of sovereign of Bihat in the Tigre region, an estate which included the great monastery of Abba-Libanos at Ham. Royal favour, in return for monastic support, took the form of liberal endowments whereby for a short time at least the monastery was enabled to supplant its rival at Debra-Damo. The king thus had under his control an area extending from Tigre to Shoa and from Begameder to Angot. But the hilly country east of the plateau, such as 'Ifat and, a

little further to the south, Hadya, was occupied increasingly by Moslem states.

The King lists of the Zagwe show a good many variations, but three names appear to recur fairly constantly: Imraha, Na'akueto La'ab, and Lalibela. We know nothing about the reign of Imraha except that a church was founded on the side of the mountain known as Abuna-Joseph. The finest achievements of the dynasty seem to have taken place in the reign of Lalibela to whom especially was due, in addition to various political reforms, the founding of the sanctuaries of Roha.

Lalibela's contacts with Cairo seem to have left the Egyptians with an impression of great splendour. In the year 1200 he sent a first envoy to arrange for a successor to replace a bishop who had just died. But Michael II, the prelate who was appointed and sent to Ethiopia, was overcome with nostalgia and fled the country after five years in office, resigning his responsibilities on the grounds that he had been persecuted. About the year 1209 a second envoy from Lalibela arrived in Cairo to seek amends and to secure the services of a more reliable member of the clergy. It was a magnificent delegation; throngs of sightseers vying for donkeys on hire at exorbitant prices made their way out of Cairo to the Patriarchal Church of Mo'allakah and the place of assembly close by. Had not the envoys brought with them as a gift for the Patriarch a crown of chased gold so finely worked that it had won universal admiration? And what of the phenomenal creatures presented to the Sultan—a giraffe, an elephant, a lion, and a zebra! The bishop who had deserted was stripped of office and publicly denounced. . . . It is also about this time that the Armenian writer Abu-Salih compiled his valuable treatise on the monasteries and Coptic churches of the period, including some rather more precise details about Ethiopia. According to this writer the king then reigning was not of the race of David but the descendant of Moses, who married the daughter of an ancient king of the land. This all-powerful prince of the realm would, he states, require no less than a year to make the round of all his various principalities. The throne of David was his, and was the seat from which he dispensed justice. He was also a priest, taking services in all the churches of the realm. The Ethiopians had moreover in their possession the Ark of the Covenant with its two tablets of stone upon which the Lord had written the Ten Commandments; it stood upon an altar and was covered with gold. Whenever there was a feast-day it was brought out and carried in procession, with an escort of Israelites of the race of David.

Envoys who had been sent to Ethiopia on business from the Patriarch were greatly impressed by the splendid pageantry that accompanied the high officials of the Church in the course of their duties; there is a description of one of these, riding slowly forth on a Sunday on the back of a mule, under cover of a huge umbrella and with an escort of five hundred horsemen, on his way to take the service in full ecclesiastical robes of gold covered with precious stones.

But the reign of Lalibela is particularly famous for the distinctive churches he left behind him. Their construction has been attributed to workmen from Jerusalem or Egypt, the Moslem persecutions having driven out numbers of Copts. Yet these monuments have preserved in every detail the characteristic art of Aksum, and are in fact the perfect culmination of its development.

Nothing is known about the church built by Lalibela on the Amba Geshena, which is the site of a sacred tree worshipped by pagans in antiquity. The buildings for which he is most famous, although not all of them date precisely to his reign, are situated at Roha, his capital, which according to Alvarez was close to a much older site where there were remains of monuments not unlike those of Aksum. The churches of Lalibela won such renown that the town is called after him, and to this day it is a place of pilgrimage for countless worshippers who come there on foot from near and far. They are monoliths, hewn in one piece out of the living rock by a technique that is not uncommon in Ethiopia. But although there are other examples belonging to different periods, in the south of Shoa for instance, where there are two in a much damaged condition, and a few in the area between Sokota and Lalibela itself that are more or less analogous to the Roha structures, there is none to compare for sheer perfection of style with the eight sanctuaries of Lasta's capital city.

The architectural skill required to work this massive rock was of an incredibly high order. The effect obtainable by this technique would be impossible to imitate except in reinforced concrete. First, the shape of the exterior was outlined in the rock by means of a huge trench excavated all round, leaving the main block standing entirely below ground level in the midst of a kind of vast quarry. The sides of this block were then carved in the form of perpendicular buttresses, sometimes varied to give the effect of a colonnade or a wall with bays, perhaps showing a cornice or an imitation roof, flat or gabled. Then the interior had to be hollowed out and suitably carved. There was no particular necessity to make the inside correspond with the plan of the exterior; the naves, once they were

carved out as required, could be given a vaulted roof in any shape or form, thus producing the effect of an intricate series of arches which would never have stayed up in any normal construction. The artists and craftsmen of Roha showed considerable ingenuity and skill in the endless variety and blending of forms that characterize their 'buildings'.

Some of these churches are entirely reminiscent of the architectural style of Aksum; the church of Emmanuel, for instance, with its bays and imitation timbered framework round the doors and windows, exactly reproduces the decoration found on the larger stelae, and is designed with three naves like the early sanctuary of Debra-Damo. Others, such as Madhane-'Alam with its five naves, and Ganata-Maryam close by, are surrounded by tall slender columns which seem to support the roof, an effect which recalls some of the pagan temples of antiquity. Then there is the church of Giyorgis, or St. George, which takes the form of a Greek cross and stands on a high rock-cut pedestal, with a pointed window in each slim wall surmounted by ornamental carving. In some cases, such as Abba-Libanos, the church is left capped with an overhanging shelf of rock, only the façade and sides having been carved out, the effect being rather like the grotto churches of Imrahanna-Christos or Jamina-du-Maryam, or some of the Coptic convents around Asyut. And in the church of St. Gabriel we have yet another form, whose elegant lines are enhanced by a series of rectangular pilasters broadening at the base.

Inside the sanctuaries the serried arches, diminishing in size, and the neat interlacing of the vaulted roofs, realistically bearing upon the main 'structure', are arranged in perfect symmetry with the sure touch of genius. There is no superfluous ornamentation to break the purity of a line; just occasionally a band of openwork in geometric patterns is allowed to emphasize a vault or a pillar. But in the design of the windows no such restriction is apparent; there are bays everywhere, ornamental clerestoreys, and a whole variety of pleasing lines. At Madhane-'Alam for instance, at the end of each transept, the light comes in at the top through a myriad star-shaped apertures, with a network of circular openings below and finally a window with its stone clerestorey pierced by a large cross.

Sometimes these sanctuaries are adorned on a large scale with figures in low relief, which is something quite exceptional in Ethiopian art. In accordance with Biblical precept, which is scrupulously followed, graven images are for the most part taboo. There is a secret chamber in one of these churches, possibly that of Golgotha,



[40 and 41] The Kings and Shepherds at the Manger, from a fifteenth century manuscript (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[42] The Nuptials of Cana, from a fifteenth century manuscript. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



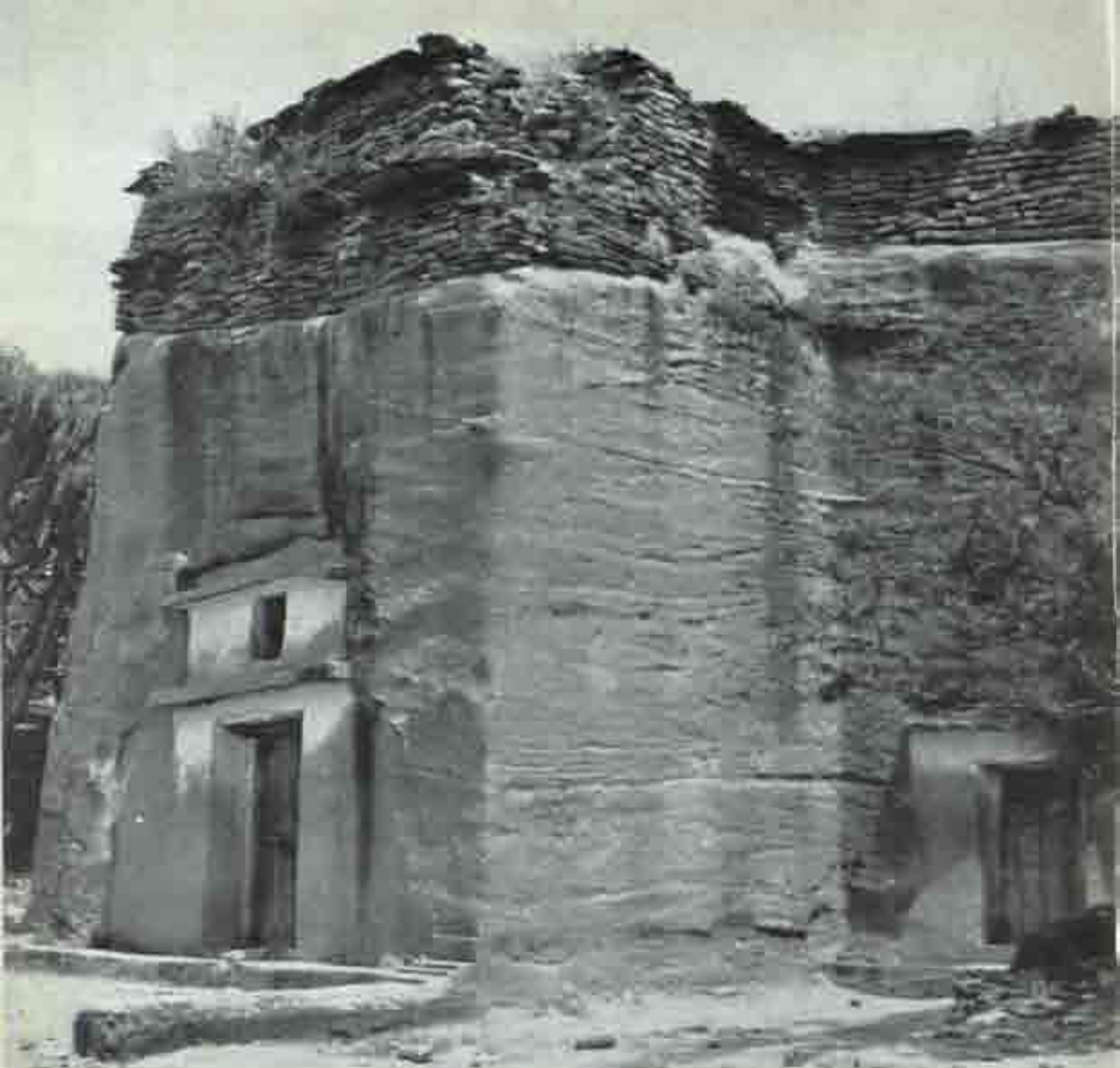
[45] Communities were maintained by the Ethiopian monks not only at Jerusalem but also at several convents in Egypt. One of the more important was the monastery of St. Anthony, now lost in the Red Sea desert not far from the Gulf of Suez. Many Coptic works were translated there into Geez and thence were spread to Ethiopia. Here, in the great enclosure of the present convent, are the ruins of buildings which the Abyssinians would have occupied. (Photo J. Döresse)



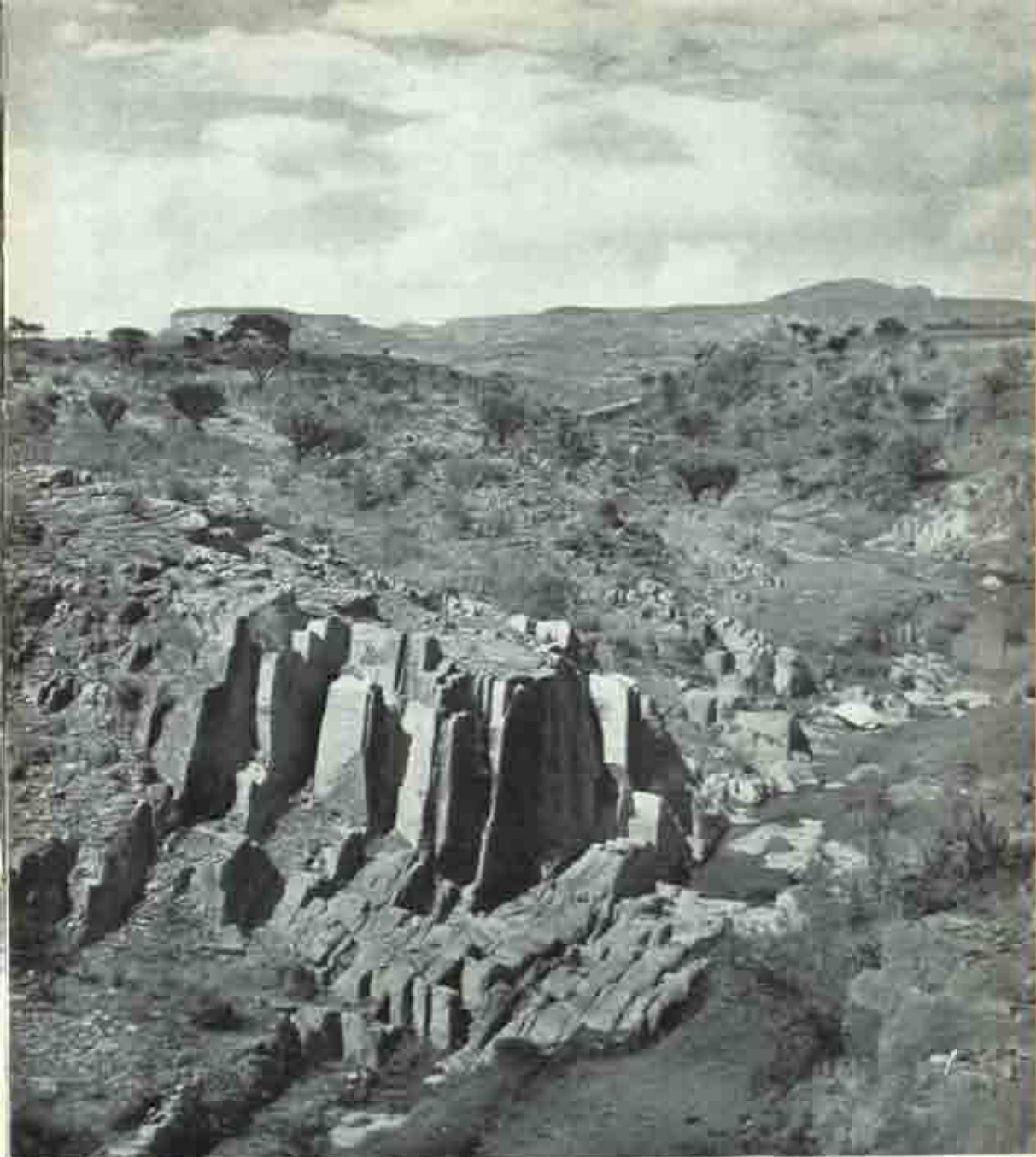
[44] Seal of an Ethiopian Lady. (Photo J. Döresse)



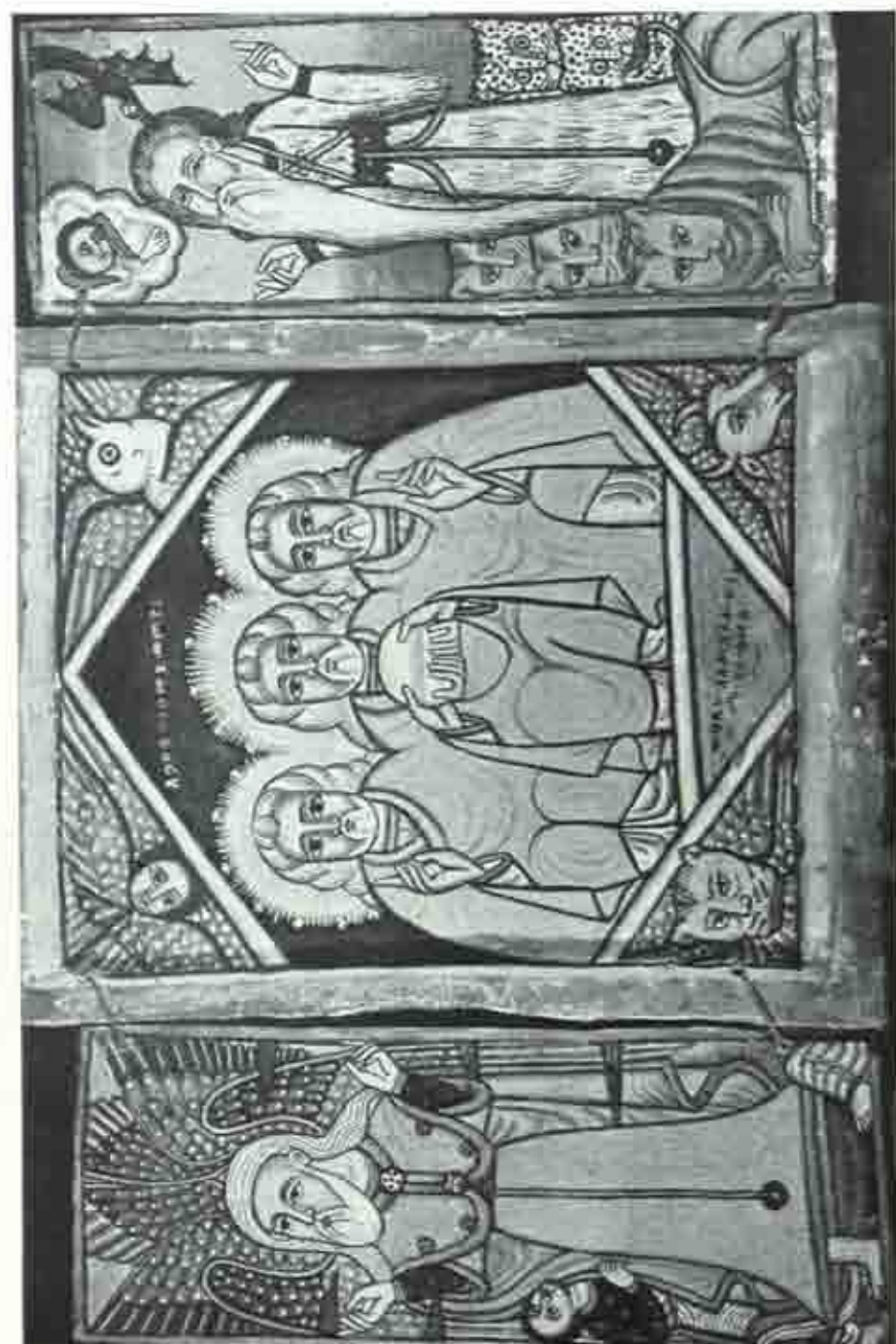
[45] In the Middle Ages magic played a considerable part in Ethiopian life, as it still does. The clergy, or *dabtaras*, copy texts in Ge'ez on parchment rolls, to use in warding off the Evil Eye or sicknesses. Designs of all sorts are added as a kind of talisman, representing the hate which affords protection against the eye of darkness; one of these designs is here reproduced. The little parchment scrolls are carried about on the person in a leather or a metal case. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



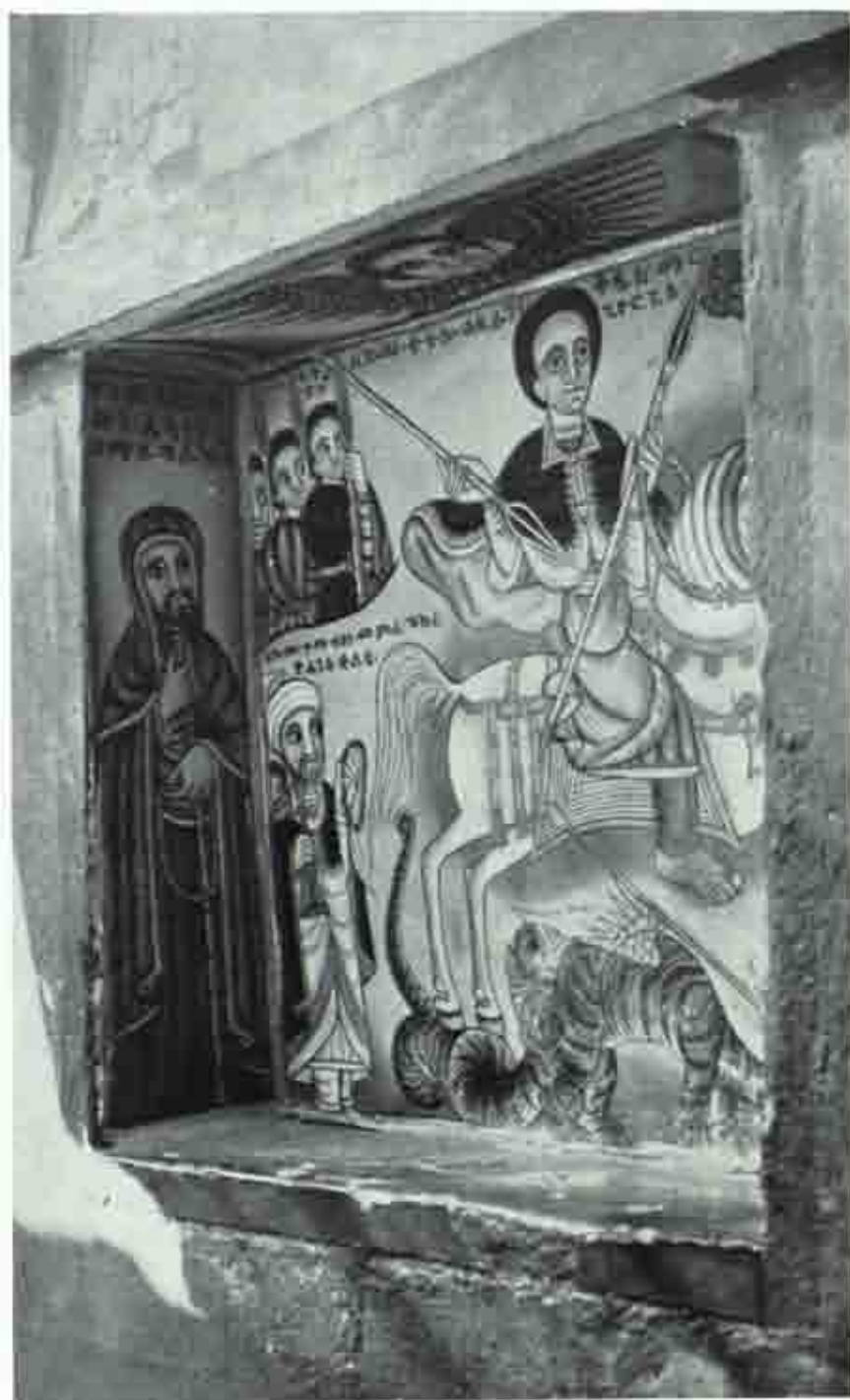
[46] Rock-cut church near Wogro, Tigre. It is hewn out of a bed of red sandstone, and has a picturesque setting of giant euphorbia. Early in the sixteenth century it was visited by Father Alvarez, who admired its three naves, sanctuaries and altar hewn from the living rock. (Photo J. Doresse)



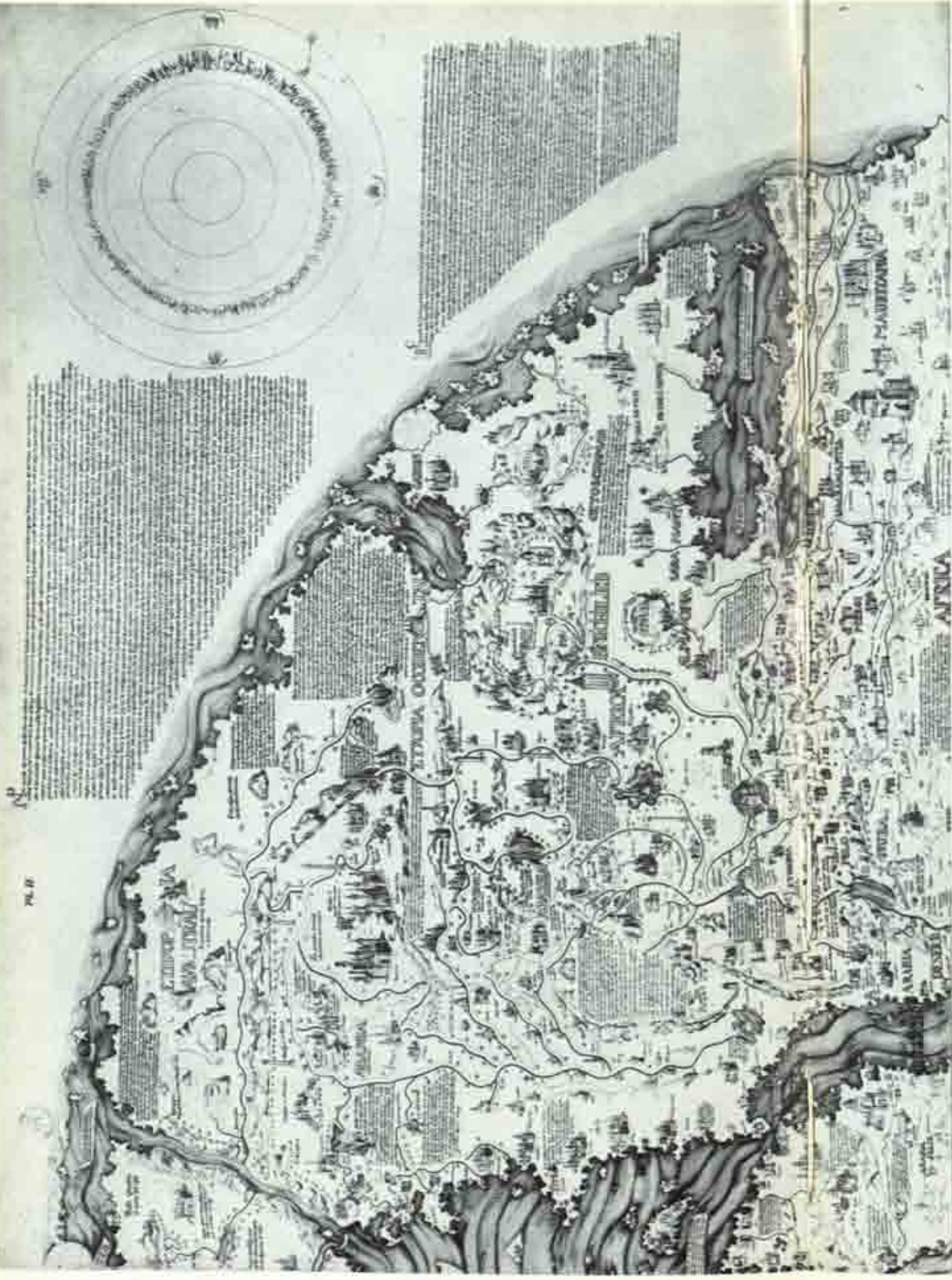
[47] Near Atzera, Tigre, about thirty miles east of Adua. On the horizon, to the left, rises a steep-sided plateau, an *amha*, at the top of which is the old monastic village of Debra-Damo, founded in the early days of the Church in Ethiopia. The only way of getting there is to climb the cliff by means of a rope. (Photo J. Doresse)



[48] Nineteenth century ikon, the centre part of which features the Holy Trinity. On the right is a representation of Gebra-Manfas-Qedlus surrounded by lions and tigers. Near Addis Ababa there is a monastery dedicated to this famous monk. On the left is Takla-Haymanot, the founder of Debra-Libanos in Shoa, shown with six wings but only one foot. He endured an austerity so extreme that he lost the other foot as a result of withering. The painter has therefore inserted it in the angle of the panel. (Photo Musée de l'Histoire)



[49] Aksum: Chapel of the Tablet of Moses. A modern painting depicting St. George overcoming the Dragon. (Photo J. Doreese)



[50] Fragment of the great World Map of Fra Mauro, made in Venice in 1375-9. It contains a mixture of ingredients from Ptolemy and mediaeval legend together with authentic material from travellers of the Middle Ages. The south is at the top instead of the bottom. It is a map of Africa from Nubia to the Cape, with the Red Sea on the left. Starting from the word *Saba*, near the bottom and slightly left centre, the name of *Etiopia* is marked fairly close to it, above. Just above this, barring the Nile, is a curious construction denoting the impassable 'Gates of Iron' of legendary fame, the cataracts which formed the river's outlet from the Land of Prester John. It was when the latter opened the gates once a year that the inundation occurred, but it was without his power to keep them closed and divert the water to Nubia, thus depriving Egypt. Beyond these gates lies Ethiopia, and around her periphery, territories marked *Arabia Occidentalis*, *Etiopia Occidentalis*, and *Etiopia Australis*. The inscription, with 'the faces of dogs', are thus the legendary Cynocephales. Outlying the Empire of Prester John is a river whose course is marked out with pillars, each topped by a cross. In the centre of the Empire occurs the name *Arassia*—Abyssinia—and to the right of this a great lake—Tana—traversed by the Nile, whose source appears as another, smaller lake. More information about the latter is given in some of the older maps, which make this the site of Paradise and the Tree of Life. Fra Mauro has retained the topography without the legend. *Arassia* is marked just above *Arassia*, and nearby is the town of *Lebela*—Lalibela—indicating an abundance of honey herds. Higher up are two large cities crowned with towers; *Barbaran*—Debra Berhan?—is on the left, while the other is described as 'Kingdom of Saba', 'Seat of the Patriarch'. This must certainly be Shoa, and the name of the city Tegal. To the left of these, and a little higher still, is Lake Zwaib, overhung by the mountain of Zekala, whose lovely crater lake with its lofty 'Abney'—the convent of Gebel Manfas-Qodius—is indicated. The river which flows down from this region, more or less parallel to the Red Sea, is the Awash. It runs beside the *man de tren*, the plain of Shoa where the Emperor David I set up one of his residences; his son Zara Yaqob, who was born in this region, later built a church to St. Michael there. The river, with the states of Dawaro and Adal stretching away on the other bank, finally disappears in the lakes of Dankali. Turning to the interior of the country, below the name *Arassia* and drawn in the direction of the 'Gates of Iron', various places can be recognised, though the names appear in some disorder: the dizzy passes of *Achafed*, used by travellers from the north on their way to the Monz plateau; *Bacantidia*, the begameder region; *Arassia* and *Wag*, and the holy city of *Arassia*. Finally, in the upper part of the map, above *Etiopia Occidentalis*, are the city and mountain of *Sakalt*, with the course of the river *Arassia* indicated in a way that suggests that the mediaeval cartographer had no doubts on the matter! (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[51] Virgin with Child, from a fifteenth century manuscript. As early as the beginning of the fifteenth century Florentine craftsmen had arrived in Ethiopia. They built the church of Debra-Worq. A little later 'Frankish' painters—one of whom was Brancalione—decorated two churches of Amhara. It is said that their paintings caused some astonished murmurings amongst the clergy and people, used as they were to the Coptic custom of portraying the Child held in the Virgin's left arm. This miniature is therefore a 'piece of heresy'; its date, 1476-7, makes it evident that the Ethiopian miniaturists lost no time in imitating these new styles in painting. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



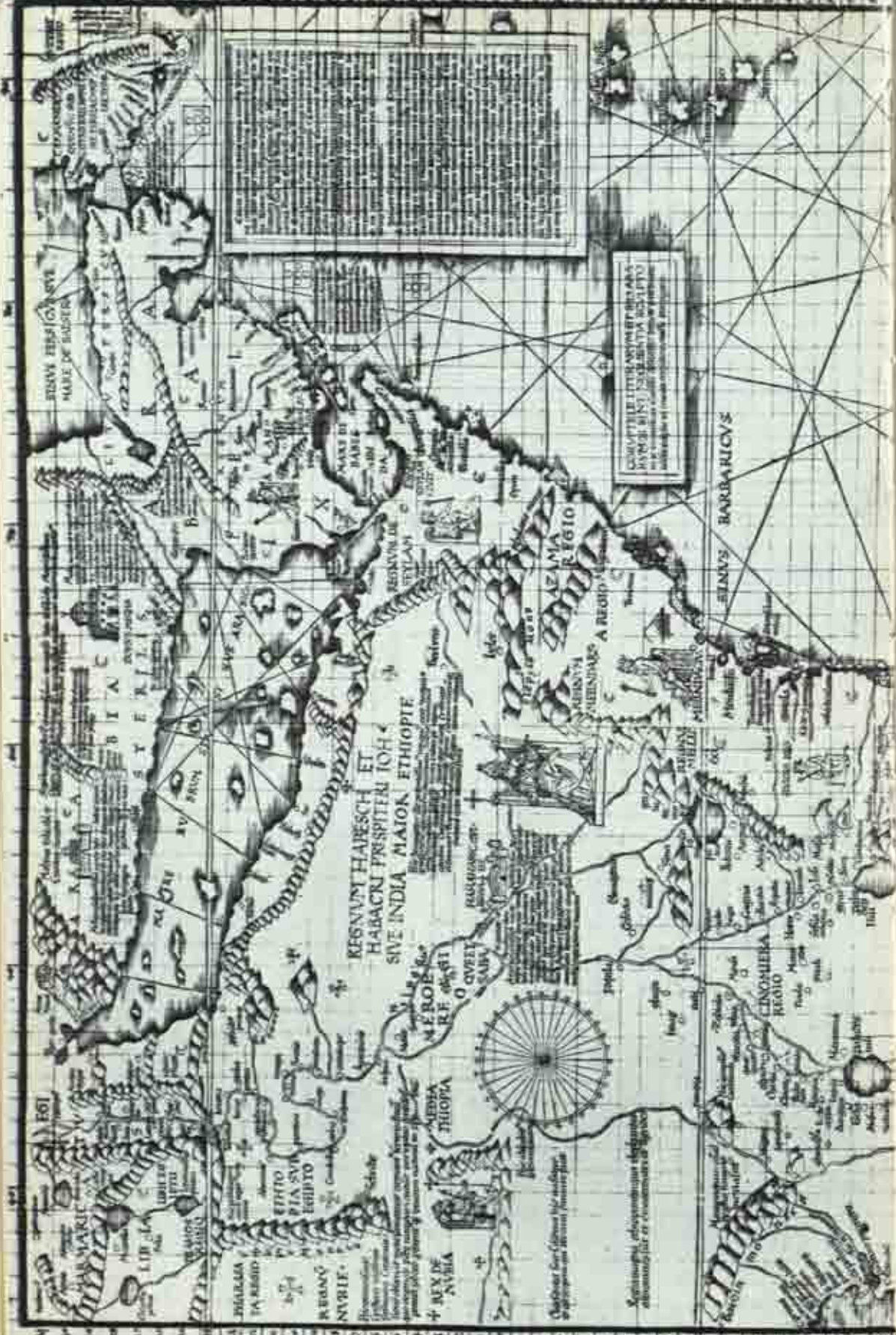
[52] 'King of Rome', or rather the Byzantine Emperor Constantine, from a fifteenth century manuscript. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)

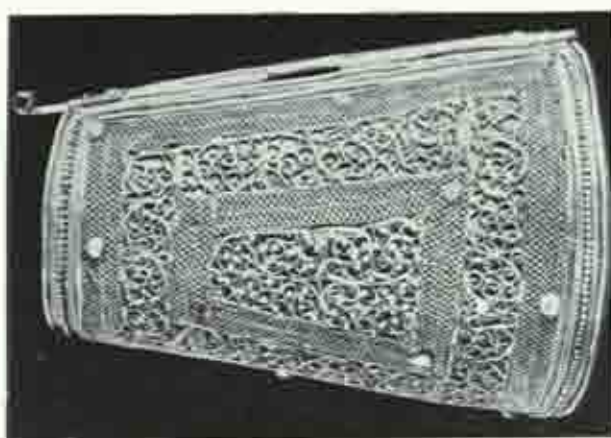


[53] King Baeda-Maryam, Bilen-Sagad, from a fifteenth century manuscript. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[54] Panorama near Dedeb-Sinn. This recent village lies on the eastern boundary of Shin, just over fifteen miles further north than Ankober. The high plain slopes down towards the warm fertile region of 'Hat, held until 1915 by one of the more prosperous of the Moslem kingdoms. Over to the right a great mountain barrier towers in the direction of the high cold plateaux of Menz and Tegalat, in medieval times the heart of Ethiopia. (Photo J. Doresee)



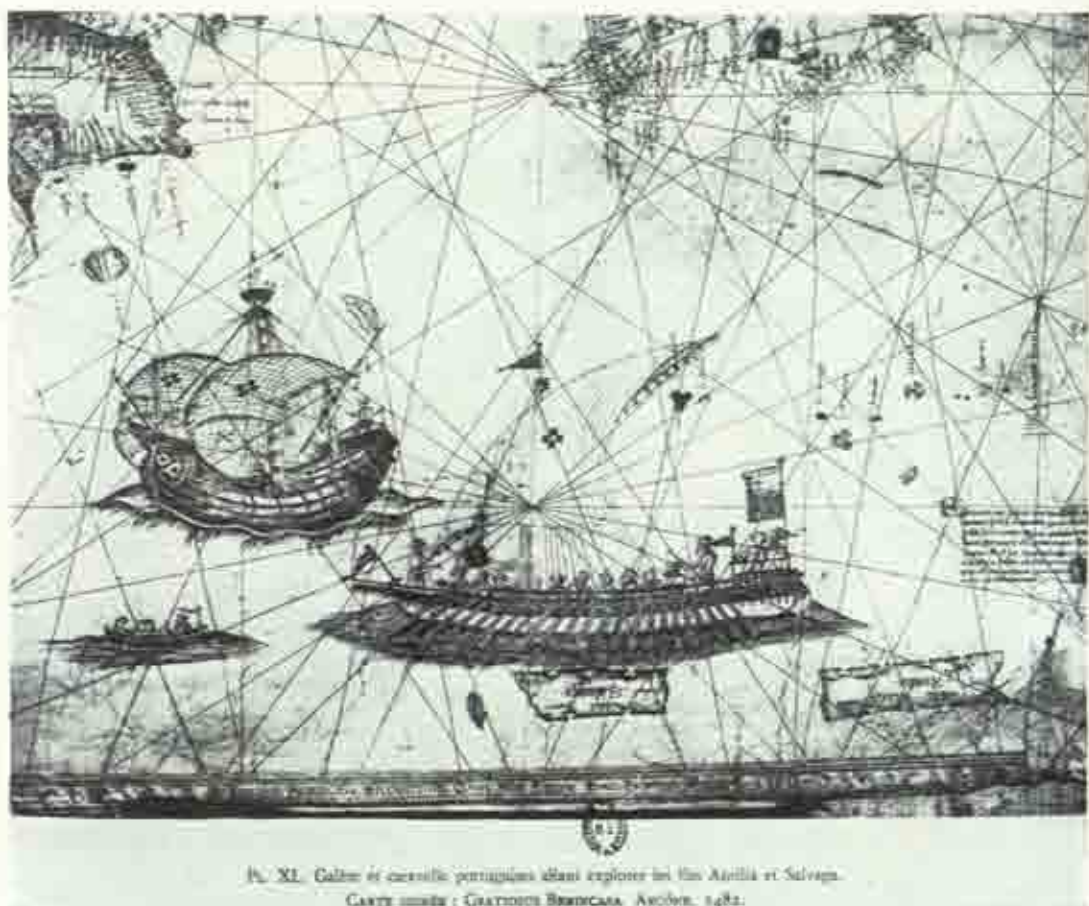


[56] Two nineteenth century silver bracelets. (Photo Musée de l'Homme)

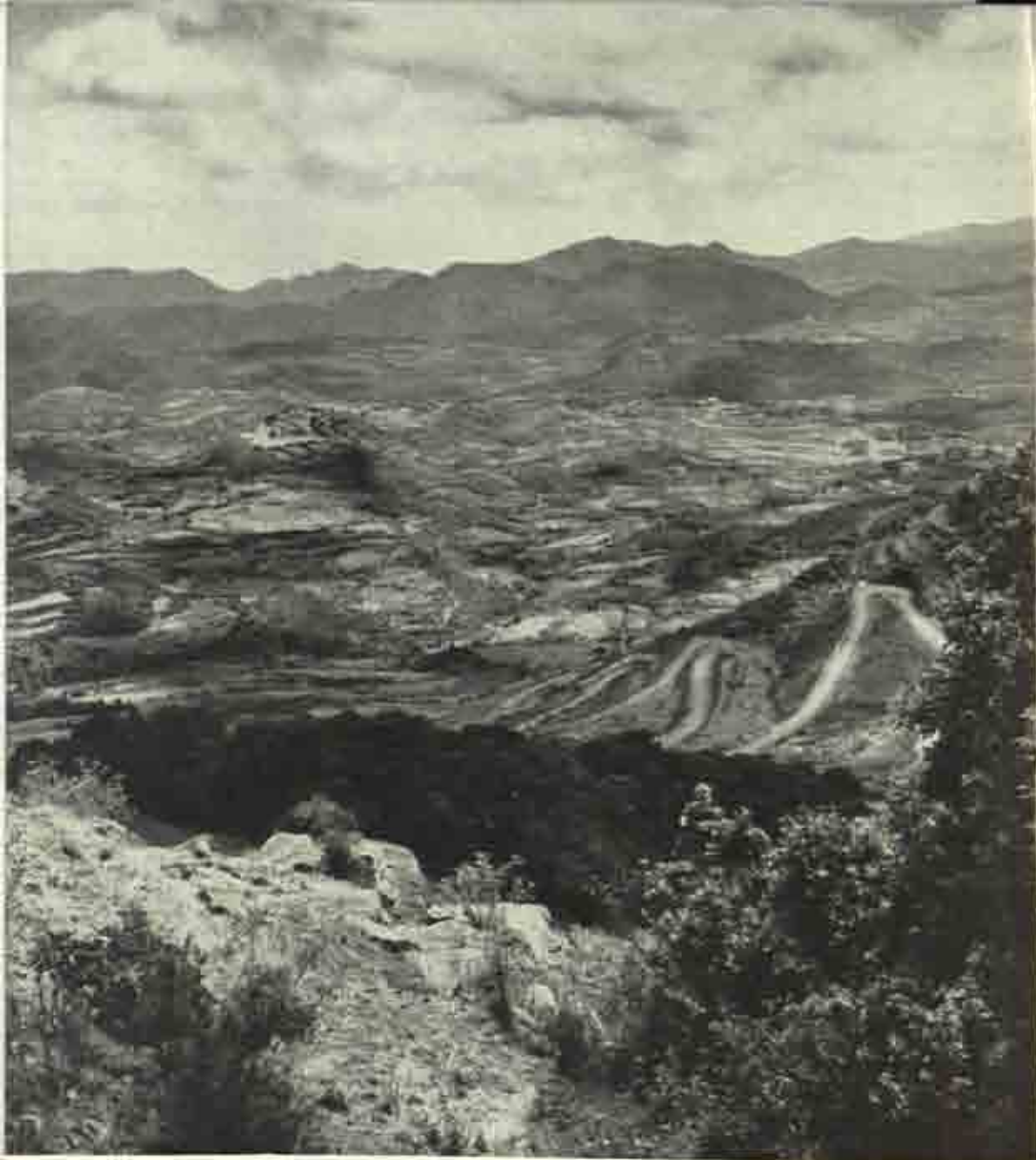
[55] Map of 'Greater India', by Waldseemüller, dated 1516. This is a rather more awkward rendering of the known facts as already attested in Piri Mauro's World Map. But it is rich in picturesque detail. In the centre is the throne of Prester John, at whose right hand is the 'Royal City of Hamharie' (Amhara) 'formerly Aksum'. . . . Lions and great dogs are chained to two gates of his palace. The Sultan of Cairo pays annual tribute so that the Nile shall remain free and the water shall not be diverted. . . . A little higher up is Meroë 'which is also Saba'—a confusion due to the native Soba, capital of the Christian realm of Alwa. In the west lies Nubia, where 'they are all Jacobite Christians'. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[57] Stele found in a Moslem cemetery in the fertile area of Quilha, near Makalle. Early in the sixteenth century Father Alvarez visited this region on foot, and remarked on 'villages whose customs differed from those of the Christians' and which were subjected to heavy tribute in the form of gold and silken goods. (Photo J. Dörssse)



(58). Fifteenth century Portuguese vessels. The fleet which put ashore the troops of Don Christophe de Gama at Massawa must have looked much the same. (After De la Roncière, *La Découverte de l'Afrique au Moyen Age*)



[59] May Tshoo: The Portuguese, following the principal route from Tigre, had to cross these mountain ranges, negotiating the most difficult parts loaded with arms and munitions on their backs. The large village of May Tshoo occupies a sheltered position in this vast basin below the slopes of the Enda-Mohuni. The chains of mountains seen on the horizon rise to a height of nearly 10,000 feet. Behind them stretches the region of Quoram and Lake Ashangui. (Photo J. Doresse)

containing four representations of the Evangelists in a somewhat unorthodox style, three of them having animals instead of human heads, lion, bull, or eagle, according to their sacred emblems.

The shrines of Lalibela seem to embody a new spiritual concept which it is not easy to interpret, but which may be connected in some way with the experiences of this king on his visit to the Holy Land. At all events his new capital seems to have been an attempt to replace Aksum as the holy city, and to become a new Jerusalem; various local names, such as Jordan, and Holy Sepulchre, with its statue of the dead Christ, seem to reflect this aim. But such speculation is perhaps better left to the learned theologian.

There are three main groups of these churches, tucked away in their huge protective cavities on the mountainside, all at different levels; in order to get from one sanctuary to the next one either has to go very carefully down a long subterranean passage or cross a mighty chasm by means of a narrow plank. In their originality of design and artistic achievement these remarkable constructions must be ranked amongst the finest architecture of the Christian world.

In addition to founding a religious centre of unusual sanctity the Zagwe dynasty was also responsible for building churches of rather more classical type in all the many regions that came to be influenced by their impassioned faith. Na'akueto La'ab even built one at Densa where the pagan Agaw worshipped a water-god. The secular element in creative achievement was doubtless not entirely lacking; at Roha, according to popular belief, there was a great palace connected with the sanctuaries by means of subterranean passages, and at the beginning of the thirteenth century certain envoys from the Coptic Patriarch described on their return some interesting features of this huge castle with its surrounding woodlands, vast corridors, and indoor fountains. . . .

But the reign of the Zagwe dynasty, which had sprung from a usurper, was destined to be short lived. Yekuno-Amlak, a prince of Amhara who came from the fertile region of Boru-Mieda near Lake Haik, incited a rebellion in the province of Shoa. The Zagwe ruler was driven out and murdered in Gaint. Part of the population of Lasta fled to the north of Ethiopia where to this day it survives in certain distinctive groups. A new Zagwe king succeeded in stirring up the people of the Shimezana region against Yekuno-Amlak, and in this enterprise he was supported by the monastery of Debra-Lābanos at Ham, with all the material and spiritual forces at its command. But he was defeated, the great monastery was captured, and its rival Debra-Damo entered upon a new era of prosperity.

The dynasty that came out of Israel was thus restored to the throne, with its line of kings traditionally descended from Solomon as maintained by the chronicles. The great historical work known as the *Kebra Nagast* must have already been in existence in rudimentary form since it was known to Abu-Salih in Egypt; but at this period it was codified with the object of proving the descent of this 'Solomonite' line of kings, and has remained in this form ever since as the official documentary evidence for the Ethiopian succession.

Later legends give a slightly different version of the overthrow of the Zagwe dynasty, emphasizing the part played by the ascetic Yasus-Moa, a monk from Debra-Damo, who came to found a new community near Debra-Egziabeher in the region of Lake Haik, and who was supposed to have influenced Yekuno-Amlak, as legitimate successor, in his bid for the throne. This story is taken up later by the monks of the famous monastery of Debra-Libanos in Shoa, and is linked with the life of Takla-Haymanot, a monk of the thirteenth century. The interpretation which appears in these writings is based on the friendship said to have existed between Takla-Haymanot and Yasus-Moa. In the course of time the account gradually changes in emphasis, Takla-Haymanot taking on the role of active participator in political affairs. A new rendering of the story thus became accepted; the fall of the Zagwe dynasty was no longer attributed to the murder of one of its last rulers, but to the intervention of Takla-Haymanot, who persuaded Na'akueto La'ab, King of Lasta, to abdicate in favour of Yekuno-Amlak. This change-over brought remarkable benefits to the spiritual sons of Takla-Haymanot; their account goes on to say that the new ruler undertook in the name of his dynasty to grant a third of his kingdom to the monastery of Debra-Libanos in return for services rendered; and that he also accorded to that monastery the privilege of maintaining *Etchagebet*, the senior monastic community of Ethiopia. This was also made the occasion to confirm the prerogative exercised by the Church of Alexandria in respect of the nomination of the senior members of the clergy and the investiture of Ethiopian bishops. The all-powerful Coptic Church was only too ready to take advantage of the opportunities offered by this pious accumulation of inaccurate writings!

One might add that these later accounts do at least testify to the fact that the descendants of the kings of Lasta were able to retain their local rights to some extent. Bruce, for instance, in 1779, records an incident brought about by the murder of one of these princelings who was descended from the Zagwe dynasty.

THE MEDIAEVAL PERIOD

WITH the accession of Yekuno-Amlak there began a period of rapid development which was to continue for another two hundred years. During this time there was a great revival in Ethiopia under a series of rulers who were scholars as well as fighters. Territorial unity was once more established, civil and religious institutions were rigorously codified, and literature and art began to flourish again.

Throughout this period numerous tribes under the sway of Islam were pressing upon the borders of Ethiopia; by the sixteenth century they had increased to dangerous proportions and threatened to overwhelm the kingdom. The Moslems were already well established in the Dahlak Islands, and in 'Ifat and Hadya; like the immigrants of old from Arabia they were quickly assimilated, setting up new towns in the sweltering heat of Somaliland, settling at Harar, spreading their doctrine amongst the tribes of 'Afar, Arussi and Sidamo, and occupying the Argobbo region. A dynasty of Ethiopian sultans known as the Walashma arose in about the year 1285 in the province of 'Ifat and established a capital there. By degrees they were able to win over the newly formed states of Fatajar and Dawaro, and also that of Bali where, near the sacred mountain of Abu'l Qasim, the sensational miracles of Sheikh-Hussein were drawing thousands of pilgrims of every faith. But in addition to the Islam that lay outside the borders of Ethiopia there were also the many tribes who had settled within Christian territory, and were exposed to the persistent attentions of Moslem traders aided and abetted by the machinations of the Egyptian bishops. It so happened that for the time being the activities of these settlers went no further than encroaching on the land they chanced to covet. It was only considerably later that they launched against Ethiopia the full weight of their hostility in all the bitterness of a holy war.

Under Yekuno-Amlak the conflict was as yet little more than a clash of principles. But his successor, Yagbe'a Seyon (1285-1294), led a campaign against 'Adal, from which he returned triumphant.

After this there was peace for a while; Moslem merchants were once again allowed over the frontier, and in return the king received concessions from the Sultan Beybars to visit the Holy Land and a safe conduct for a new *Abuna* to replace the previous one who had died some years before.

Meanwhile, however, Mohammed-ibn-Qala'un in Cairo had begun to persecute the Copts once more and to destroy their churches, while the local dynasty in 'Ifat chose to interpret the truce as a sign of political weakness. 'Amda-Seyon (1314-1344) took up the cudgels by demanding restoration of the churches destroyed by Ibn Qala'un, with the threat that failure to do so would result in diversion of the Nile waters and reprisals against any Moslem who entered the realm. Not only did his ambassador return without the required undertaking, but his lands were raided by the Sultan of 'Ifat, Haqq-ed-Din, who proceeded to burn down the churches and compel the people to embrace Islam, murdering an ambassador from the king into the bargain. This was too much for 'Amda-Seyon, who forthwith devoted his life to the cause of his country; his subsequent exploits attest a glorious revival in Ethiopian prestige. In 1328 he conquered 'Ifat and Fatajar, appointing as governor the brother of the defeated sultan; but the new leader sought an alliance against him with the people of Hadya and Dawaro, and, interestingly enough, with the Jewish section of the Agaw population inhabiting the northern fringe of Lake Tana. This manoeuvre was foiled by 'Amda-Seyon, who laid waste the lands of Hadya, Fatajar and Dawaro and placed them under the control of yet another brother of the two sultans he had overthrown. But he had still to secure the downfall of two further coalitions of a similar nature before he was able at last to destroy the capital of 'Ifat and its mosques. Within a short space of time he had pushed forward his eastern frontier down as far as the River Awash in the lowland area, and had annexed the Shoan province of Menz. Gojjam and Damot were now under his control and in Begameder his territory extended as far as the future site of Gondar. In Tigre, where his wife Bilen-Saba was queen of Bihat, in virtue of which the monastery of Debra-Libanos at Ham was privileged to receive a royal grant, a revolt broke out under Yabika-Egsi, regrettably backed by the illustrious monastery, and was put down by the king in 1320. It is true that the Ethiopia over which he reigned was as yet little more than a collection of small states—a Moslem writer refers to ninety-nine kings ruled by the Emperor!—with no definite seat of government apart from the sacred city of Aksum and a rather vague

royal residence at Tegalat. But in religion, art, and political organization the country was steadily going forward. The first attempts to frame a Royal Charter, as later embodied in the *Serata Mangest*, in order that the central responsibilities of the King and the hierarchical pattern should be clearly defined, date from the reign of 'Amda-Seyon, and for the first time popular songs were composed in honour of the king, a mark of his considerable prestige. Scholars began to revise the Aksumite translations from the Scriptures; the texts for numerous rites and liturgies were transcribed in Geez for the first time, apocryphal works such as the *History of Adam* and legends relating to the Apostles enriched the libraries, and hymnals began to appear. There are a number of fine manuscripts on parchment which date to this period, with miniatures remarkable for the way in which they evoke the harsh impact of an art which lasted up to the end of the fifteenth century. The figures depicted are highly stylized, distorted shapes in crude bands of garish colours, yellows, reds, and dark blues, reminiscent of certain modern upholstery.

The early part of the reign of 'Amda-Seyon had been one of great vexation for the monastic brethren, who reproached the new king for having taken to wife his father's concubines, a practice not uncommon at the time. 'Amda-Seyon had had to make a show of submitting to excommunication at the hands of Abba Honorius, but afterwards used this as a pretext to condemn the monk as a heretic, having him flogged publicly in the market-place and subjecting the religious community at Debra-Libanos in Shoa to temporary exile. Nevertheless he soon showed the same zeal as had his predecessors in the matter of pious building works. On the islands of Lake Tana the monasteries of Kevra'an and Galila-Zakarias were founded, and in the plague-ridden swamps of the Takaze River in Woldebbba Abba-Samuel charmed his lions and set up gruesome places of refuge. Before 1520, as we have already seen, the monastery at Ham was in receipt of a royal grant, which not surprisingly appears to have ceased after the Tigrean revolt. It was Debra-Damo which afterwards benefited from the royal bequests in return for certain services, and as a result the monastery became the greatest scholastic centre in the country down to the middle of the sixteenth century.

No effort was spared to convert the heathen and by so doing incorporate into the kingdom tribes not hitherto fully under control. In this task it was the spiritual sons of the great monks Takla-Haymanot and Eustathius who won special distinction. The career of Takla-Haymanot ended in 1512; Eustathius, who died somewhere about the middle of the fourteenth century, founded the

monastery of Debra-Maryam, which had a number of offshoots rivalling the monastic order of Debra-Libanos. In his great zeal he was responsible for the destruction of a number of sacred trees and pagan shrines which he reduced to ashes. His mortification of the flesh was terrifying: 'Fetch me some chains', he said one day to his disciple, 'and leave them in the sun until they are red-hot!' The saint then attired himself in this strange harness, binding it round his neck, his hands, and his feet, until his skin blistered and he resembled, according to the text, 'a fish grilled in the fire'. He was at all times a fanatical pilgrim; towards the end of his life he went into retreat in Lower Egypt and died eventually in Armenia where he was buried with much pomp at Marmenham. This curious event is by no means the only indication of the link that existed in mediaeval times between Ethiopia and distant Armenia, a country for which the former seemed to have some kind of fellow feeling. It was about this time that Hetum the Armenian counselled Pope Clement V to negotiate by letter a treaty with the king of Ethiopia: 'The letters could well be entrusted to the King of Armenia, who would have them translated into the language of the Ethiopians and send them on by a reliable messenger.' From Armenia, too, came not only holy relics but also monks into Ethiopia; some of these brethren are famous for their writings in Geez.

Ethiopia had by now acquired such prestige that during the reign of Sayfa-'Arad (1544-1572) she was able to take on the role of official protector of the Patriarchy of Alexandria. Thus in 1552 she avenged the imprisonment of the Patriarch Mark by executing or forcibly converting all Egyptian merchants found on Ethiopian territory. This vigorous intervention soon resulted in improved relations with Egypt. David I (1582-1611), to whom a rather doubtful tradition attributes an expedition against Sennaar in aid of the Copts, welcomed at his court an ambassador from the Hanafite Emir of Egypt, sending in return twenty-two camels loaded with gifts for the Sultan Barquq. From Jerusalem he obtained a piece of the True Cross and a number of religious paintings including the famous *Kuer'ata Re'su*, which depicts the figure of Christ crowned with thorns. In Tegulat, the capital, the ikons were welcomed with great solemnity, after which they were distributed amongst various churches in the Begameder region. At about the same time some Florentine craftsmen found their way to Ethiopia; they took part not long afterwards in the building of Debra-Worq, 'Abbey of Gold', in the Gojjam region. Turkish artisans also settled in the country; they excelled in making coats of mail and weapons

of various kinds. Subsequently, in the reign of Yeshak (1414-1429), an Egyptian Mameluk did much to reform the Ethiopian army and instruct the military in the use of 'Greek fire', while the reorganization of taxation owed a great deal to Coptic skill in financial administration.

In a spirit of reciprocity the monks of Ethiopia swarmed out along the route through Nubia to Cairo and the Holy Land. Traces of their journeyings have been found at Dongola. They probably visited the many churches of Nubia, whose history is still obscure, and developed numerous links with Egypt's great monasteries, maintaining priories at Cairo in the Christian quarter and elsewhere; one of their paintings has survived at a monastery in the Wadi-Natrun, and at the famous retreat founded by St. Anthony in the desert a house was erected for their use. Similar facilities attended them in Jerusalem, and many went on to Cyprus or Armenia, even to Rome, if the devil pushed hard enough, where they developed the art of making themselves thoroughly at home. The end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth was certainly a prosperous period. This was the time when the Abba Salama, a metropolitan bishop who was sent from Cairo in 1350 and lived for another forty years, broke away from the traditional incapacity of his predecessors by making a vast contribution to Ethiopian ecclesiastical literature. The impact of his intellect spurred on the monks to translate the *Senodos* and *Didascalia* from the Arabic, and also possibly at this time the *Fetha-Nagast* or *Judgments of the Kings*, which was to become the standard work on Ecclesiastical and Civil Law in Ethiopia. These three works took their form from the official code of the Coptic Church as drawn up in the thirteenth century by Abu'l-Fadal Ibn-al-Assal. At the same time the local brethren were busy writing their voluminous biographies relating to pious founders such as Abba-Libanos or Gabra-Manfas-Qeddus, 'Servant of the Holy Spirit', according to Abbo, or recording the story of the Zagwe dynasty, Lalibela and Na'-akueto La'ab now taking their place among the saints. Historical literature proper can be said to begin with the record of the exploits of 'Amda-Seyon. And in the Egyptian desert Simeon, who was a monk of St. Anthony's retreat, began his translation into Geez of the monumental *Synaxarium* with its collected biographies of the Coptic saints, later enlarged by the Ethiopians to include the lives of their great masters.

In all this spate of literature one curious piece of writing deserves special mention, dating to the brief reign of Theodore I (1414). It

is a prophetic work entitled *Fekare-Iyasus*, or *Prophecy of Jesus*, in which Christ is supposed to tell the Apostles about a king who will rise in the East, whose name is Theodore, and who will bring back peace and plenty to the world. But Theodore I reigned for only nine months, a period which was not quite the golden age as described, and this revelation of a world to come was henceforth a vision to stir the hearts of all who yearned for the advent, in a not-too-distant future, of a miraculous king. . . .

While literature and art were beginning to flourish as never before, the campaigns against 'Ifat were still going on under Sayfa-'Arad, David, and Yeshaq. Already there were episodes which gave the Moslem assaults the complexion of a holy war:

'Along with Sa'ad-ed-Din (the Sultan of 'Ifat) there were lawyers, dervishes, and peasants, every inhabitant of the land. All of them had sworn the oath to die. A fierce battle was engaged: four hundred pious sheikhs, each carrying his jar of ablutions and accompanied by numerous dervishes, fell martyred. . . .'

The Emperor Yeshaq, who defeated these fanatics, carried out a reprisal raid on the port of Zaila, capturing it in 1415 and in so doing terminating for good the history of the 'Ifat sultanate. The mosques were razed to the ground and churches built in their place. Massawa was twice attacked by Yeshaq, who also sent a fleet to invade the isles of Dahlak, pressed southwards as far as Lake Abaya, seized Enarya with its great gold mines, and made war on the Jewish Agaw, known as the *Falasha*. These people practised strange ancient rites and possessed an apocryphal literature in Geez. Yeshaq began a series of campaigns against them, which were continued under his successors; and he succeeded in driving them out of Dambia and Waggara, where he founded the churches of Kosoge and Yeshaq-Dabr.

But the greatest ruler of this dynasty, one of the greatest Ethiopia has ever known, was Zara Yaqob, 'Seed of Jacob' (1434-1468). The way ahead was indeed formidable; the task of consolidating and unifying Ethiopian territory and propagating the Christian faith therein was by no means completed, and in addition it was necessary to establish and administer forthwith a strict code of laws admitting of no compromise, the same stringent code that governs the life of Ethiopia to this day.

Almost as soon as he came to the throne the king visited Aksum for his coronation. On his way back he founded a number of churches and certain monasteries such as Metmaq, which he set up in Tegulat, his place of residence, in 1441, naming it after the famous

Egyptian convent whose destruction had just been reported. A little later he moved his capital and royal residence lower down to the cold windy region of Debra-Berhan, 'Abbey of Light', so-called because there had appeared in the sky a shining Cross.

The Moslem states which had been the scene of constant skirmishing with his predecessors now found themselves overpowered and incorporated into the Empire. But the Walashma had succeeded in forming a new state further off, under the name of 'Adal, with Dakar as its capital, a little to the south-east of Harar. The sultan of this kingdom had invaded Dawaro in 1445, but almost at once was defeated and put to death, so that peace was restored. Zara-Yaqob was now able to devote himself not only to spreading Christianity, which he imposed by force upon the pagan peoples of Gojjam and Damot, but to intensive religious reform at home amongst his already Christian subjects. A decree went out ordering everyone to bear on his forehead and arms the protestation of his faith and renunciation of the Devil in the form of tattoo markings. Practitioners of magic were denounced. Feast days to be observed, and periods of fasting, were established. The king decreed that the Saturday, or Sabbath, was to be kept holy, a regulation which was criticized as 'Judaism' and caused a revolt among the monks of Debra-Libanos. Anyone who did not conform, even if it happened to be the King's own son, was punished without mercy. A long struggle against heresy began. The reign of Zara-Yaqob saw the beginnings of the great theological disputes which have since raged at intervals in Ethiopia. The king took an active part in these controversies, not only by using force against offenders, but by literary argument, for Zara-Yaqob with all his fear of spirits and sorcerers was a great religious writer. Among his numerous works is the *Matshafa Berhan* or 'Book of the Light', a collection of religious precepts concerning the discipline of the Christian faith; another, *Matshafa Milad*, deals with the Jews and the Stephanite heretics. During his reign the 'Miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary' was translated, an enormous work compiled partly from the Latin accounts of Saint Ildefonse and partly from Coptic writings originating at the Egyptian monastery of El Moharrak. Biographies of monks and saints began to multiply, as did collections of hymns. Books of revelations were compiled, for example the curious work entitled 'Book of the Mystery of Heaven and Earth', by Baheyla-Mikael. Occult literature of diverse origin began to appear in great profusion, cabalistic works of a kind which have always been in great demand in Ethiopia, though not always entirely openly. In these writings the

innumerable secret names of God and Jesus are revealed, and magical spells and incantations are set down together with astrological formulas. Other works include the apocryphal 'Book of Enoch' and the *Lefafa Sedek*, or 'Bandlet of Truth', which was a set of magical prayers written on a roll of parchment which could then be buried with the deceased, rather like the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*.

The reign of Zara-Yaqob saw the beginnings of diplomatic relations with the rulers of Europe, hardly perceptible perhaps, but none the less real. Yeshaq had already written to Alfonso of Aragon proposing an alliance, and in the latter's reply, which actually reached Zara-Yaqob, he went further and proposed an exchange in marriage. At about the same time, between 1439 and 1441, the Council of Florence was encouraging the entry of Ethiopian monks from Jerusalem. This was also the period of the early, all too brief accounts of their travels by the Venetians, followed, in 1457, by the somewhat hypothetical map of Abyssinia drawn by Fra Mauro.

Zara-Yaqob died in 1468. He was buried near Lake Tana in the monastic church on the Isle of Dak. He left behind him an Empire which extended from the Baraka River and Massawa down to Ifat, Fatajar, and Bali. He had put down the sultan of Hadya and had retained the Sidamo region, previously conquered as far as Wolamo by his predecessor Yeshaq. Towns were beginning to appear here and there in the south of the Shoan province, at Entotto, for instance, probably in the neighbourhood of Mount Mannagesha, where remains of walls have survived, and at Yarar, where Theodore built a palace; also possibly on the northern shores of Lake Zwai, where monks had settled on the islands, and on the mountain slopes of Jibat. Ethiopia was already beginning to look not unlike the country we know today. The Moslem states were quiet for the time being, and Ba'eda-Maryam (1468-1478) was able to take advantage of this truce early in his reign to send an expedition against the Falasha of Semen and Salmat, defeating the former; and to conduct in person a campaign against the Doba around Amba-Alagi, where they swarmed across the great highway used by caravans bringing goods from Tigre.

But Ba'eda-Maryam revived some of the old feudal institutions which Zara-Yaqob had had the wisdom to bring under central control. It was an unfortunate policy. For now there were fresh Moslem tribes massing beyond the frontier, men who were adept with the javelin and dagger. They were gathering in the desert

regions of 'Afar, 'Adal, Danakil and Somali, encroaching upon the slopes of the Ethiopian plateau as they were apt to do at the time of the seasonal migration, and on the alert for any chance encounter. The situation was all the more dangerous in that their leaders were no longer political or military chieftains as hitherto, but *imams*, who were quite capable of launching them into a veritable holy war. The first clash came in 1471 when an army of 'Adal was defeated. In 1475 and 1474 it was the turn of the Ethiopians to suffer defeat at the hands of the 'Afar tribes. Eskender, or Alexander (1478-1494), who followed Ba'eda-Maryam, at first retaliated by advancing to Dakar and laying waste the enemy capital; but he was surprised by the Moslems on his return and routed. Later he was killed during an expedition to the Salt Plain. Ethiopia's military supremacy had once more been undermined. She now had to face the repeated onslaughts of Moslem hordes who very nearly succeeded in causing her complete downfall in the course of the next fifty years or less. From this fate however the country was saved eventually by her new allies, who had responded to the letters of Yeshaq and Zara-Yaqob, and were already preparing to come to her aid. Their first envoy, Pedro de Covilham, set foot in Ethiopia in 1495. He remained there until the day of his death. He brought news that Portugal was willing to send help, and fifty years later the soldiers of Don Christofe da Gama brought new confidence and hope to Ethiopia.

VI

THE STRUGGLE WITH ISLAM

WITH the reign of Na'od a new era opened up once more for Ethiopia. This time the country was caught up in a swift current of events that flung her into contact with other Christian states after a separation of nine centuries. In the past she had appeared to the West as the mighty Empire of Aksum, the ally of Byzantium, guardian of the gates that opened on continents and unknown seas. Now she had suddenly become the embodiment of the fabulous kingdom of Prester John, sought by pilgrims since the days of the Crusades all over Central Asia and India, until on the basis of rather more precise information it was decided that Africa was more likely to yield an answer to this mystery. Yet how could this be, since well-informed travellers had insisted that a Prester John had suffered defeat three hundred years before, far off in the eastern lands of the Medes and Persians? A fifteenth-century writer sought thus to explain the problem:

'These countries (Nubia and Ethiopia) are all that remain to Prester John since the great Khan of Cathay (China) fought him in battle on the beautiful plain of Tenduch. Overwhelmed by the great host of the enemy, Prester John lost the whole of his territory in Asia. He has retained only the provinces of Ethiopia and Nubia, which are abundant in gold and silver.'

But all this had now become unimportant. The realm so eagerly sought could now be entered, and it was the Portuguese who made the discovery, sailing down the Red Sea in the wake of all the great navigators of the past, Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and Arabs. The first stage in the story of this discovery has already been mentioned: the arrival of Pedro de Covilham in 1495, following an exchange of letters between the Emperors Yeshaq and Zara-Yaqob and the kings of the West. In 1499 Vasco bombarded Mogadiscio, and Sokotra was taken by the Portuguese a few years later; Berbera and Zaila were sacked soon after, and in 1520 there came ashore the first real ambassador to set foot on Ethiopian soil. For Europe and Ethiopia alike it was an astounding event.

This chain of events had been in the main designed as part of a carefully worked-out plan conceived by the great Albuquerque and based on a project dating to the thirteenth century. His idea was to launch an expedition against Mecca, using the port of Massawa and enlisting the support of Prester John. The realization of these hopes no doubt became somewhat remote on the death of the great conqueror in 1515 and, two years later, on the appearance of the Turks in this area. But the spirit of the enterprise remained. After two and a half centuries a new Crusade was beginning! The bitter battles fought by the Portuguese both on the sea and in the coastal areas give some indication of the violent counter-attacks Ethiopia was undergoing at the same time, hemmed in by the same enemy hosts. Once more she was heavily engaged in the full horror of a clash between the East and the Christian world.

Na'od, the Ethiopian king (1494-1508) witnessed only the beginning of these events; those of more consequence occurred more about the middle of the sixteenth century. But his wife, the Empress Helena, who was possessed of great wisdom, lived on until 1520, and did much to enable her country to enter into the Western alliance. She was, as was often the case at this period, the daughter of the prince of Dawaro, one of the Moslem vassals of the Emperor; such marriages enabled the king to foster and strengthen every possible link with his Islamic provinces. Helena, before receiving the title of Empress, was baptized as a Christian. She proved to be possessed of sound political judgment and a detailed knowledge of contemporary affairs, maintaining diplomatic relations with far-off countries, and demonstrating once more the remarkable part played in Christian Ethiopia not only by the queen but by women in general.

The reign of Na'od might well have been a peaceful one, for the Sultan of 'Adal had no wish for it to be otherwise, if the Emir of Harar had not begun a series of marauding attacks on the Ethiopians, maliciously taking advantage of the latter's debilitated state during the periods of severe fasting that were ordained by the Coptic Church. All the same he was defeated without much trouble by Na'od, who was a good strategist, and the king thus had time to devote himself to the composition of hymns rich in poetic and religious feeling. 'Thou art nearer to me than I myself!' he exclaimed in a poem addressed to Christ. He was also responsible for building fine churches such as the 'House of the Holy Trinity', *Makana Selassie*; while the Empress built and lavishly endowed that of *Mertula-Maryam*, 'Mary's Tent', which was designed on

entirely western lines with carvings and moulding skilfully worked in contemporary Italian style, as one can see from the ruined walls even today.

On the death of Na'od his son Lebna-Dengel, 'Incense of the Virgin', who was still a child, succeeded to the throne (1508-1540). Helena acted therefore as regent. It was she who in 1509 on the advice of Pedro de Covilham dispatched an ambassador in the shape of Matthew the Armenian to the court of the Portuguese King, Don Manuel. His mission was to persuade the Portuguese, who had what the Ethiopians lacked, namely a fleet, to seize the coastal ports and cut off the Abyssinian Moslems from their supplies, virtually anticipating Albuquerque's plan of campaign. But Matthew, armed with a piece of the True Cross as his passport, had some difficulty in reaching India and thence Portugal, where he finally came ashore after four weary years at sea. During this period Ethiopia was prosperous for a time, large caravans of merchandise plying a brisk trade with the Nile Valley and Egypt. Successful exploits crowned the career of Lebna-Dengel with a deceptive glory. An expedition against Fatajar was mounted in 1516 by the Emir of Harar, with the help of troops from Arabia who had rallied to the standard. He was ambushed by Lebna-Dengel, who slew him and invaded 'Adal, destroying the palace of the sultan at the very moment when, by a sheer coincidence, the Portuguese fleet were making their surprise attack on Zaila and setting fire to the town.

Thus when the first Portuguese embassy arrived, hoping to effect simultaneously a military alliance with Ethiopia and her conversion to Catholicism, it was to find the king somewhat unduly elated by his personal achievements.

The embassy came ashore at Massawa in April, 1520. Matthew the Armenian, who had been brought back again in order to effect the necessary introductions, died during the first few days of the journey and was buried near Asmara, at the monastery of Debra-Bizan; the design of this building, and the paintings that it contained, gave the travellers their first shock. Without their guide the little band soon found itself in difficulty. Going through Yeha and Aksum, where the ancient monuments caused them considerable astonishment, and continuing by way of the Amba-Alagi, Lake Ashangi, Lalibela and Lake Haik, they gradually made their way across the ridges to Shoa and met the Emperor at Debra-Libanos. This route, which is probably the most historic in the land, studded with monasteries, towns, villages and important markets, twists and turns across the high plateau which is the Ethiopian home of

the Christian faith, and there is no way down to the valleys and plains that stretch beneath. At Debra-Libanos the King was in no particular hurry to receive the visitors. Queen Helena was old and no longer took part in affairs of the realm; her influence was fading fast. It was popularly believed that the time had come when Ethiopia would fulfil the prophecies and destroy Mecca. There seemed no reason, therefore, to welcome the ambassadors with open arms. From time to time they would be sent for, suddenly, in the middle of the night, and conducted between rows of attendants, all bearing candles, to a dais where a curtain was drawn aside to reveal the king clad in garments of brocade, a tiara upon his head and in his hand a silver cross. His holy visage would be veiled. The Portuguese would be interrogated; they would be asked why they had failed to bring a sufficiency of gifts, their adventures *en route* having stripped them of most of these. The subject of their mission was deliberately avoided as a topic of conversation. Time passed. . . . The Emperor after a while gave them permission to celebrate Mass, a ceremony which evidently evoked wonder and respect. Lebna-Dengel's faith in his own resources was such that he saw no point in hastening into alliance, but eventually initial negotiations took place and by the time the Portuguese ships called at Massawa in 1526 to take them home, the delegates had at least been able to obtain written proposals to put before their king. If their political achievements were somewhat flimsy, they at least brought back to the impatient Western world a preliminary report on the country itself, which contains, in spite of its frontispiece depicting the Ethiopian ruler arrayed in cloak and plumes, factual descriptions that are entirely accurate.

But Lebna-Dengel made a great mistake in viewing the future with such lack of concern; for trouble was brewing among the Moslem states. The settlers, it is true, were hardly affected as yet, the rich business-men of Harar and other cities whose chief concern was to protect the traffic in calico, silk, and spices. But it was amongst the tribes of Somali and Danakil, turbulent and intractable nomads, that continual disturbances were rife. Every now and again the trouble would die down for a time, as when Abun-ben-Adash became governor and succeeded in restoring law and order, exterminating robbers and putting a stop to gambling, wild drinking orgies, and barbarous dancing to the rhythm of the drum. But his rigorous régime offended the Sultan, Abu-Bakr, who had him put to death at Zaila in 1525. This Sultan set up his residence at Harar, Dakar having been destroyed. He allowed everything to go

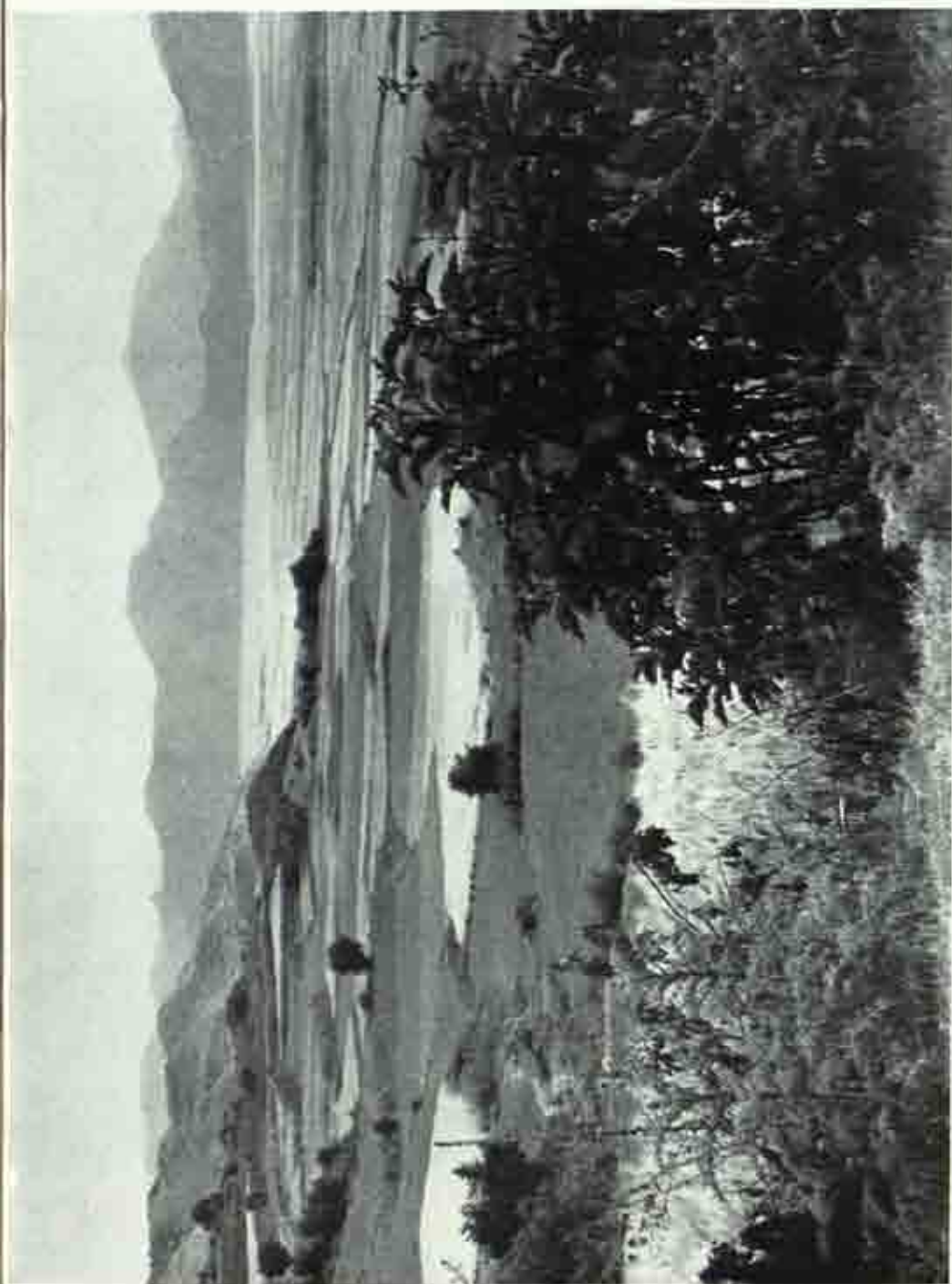
to rack and ruin; marauding and vice were soon rife everywhere. From now on any desire for justice on the part of the 'Adal Moslems was unlikely to be met by secular administrators. What they needed was a different kind of leader, one who could restore discipline in the name of religion, an *Imam*; and such a one was found in one Ahmed-al-Ghazi, known to the Ethiopians as the Gran, or the 'Left-handed'. From the first he was revered as if he were a saint or a prophet: 'He is neither sultan nor emir', said his followers, 'he is the *Imam* of the Faithful, the *Imam* of the end of the world!' As soon as he came into power Gran slew the Sultan and thus secured supreme authority. An Ethiopian army led by the governor of Bali advanced against him in 1527 and was promptly defeated. Gran reorganized his forces, rallying large numbers of Somali troops, fanatics to the last man. He began a holy war which was to last until 1542, completely laying waste large areas of the highland plateau in one campaign after another. The onslaught began in 1528 with a decisive victory at Shambera-Kuere which enabled the *Imam* to occupy Dawaro, Shoa, Amhara and Lasta, subduing Bali, Hadya and Sidamo on the way, and wiping out the Christian population of Kambata. After this he destroyed one by one the treasures of Ethiopia accumulated over the centuries by her great rulers, monuments and priceless objects whose magnificence was never to be known to Europe except from accounts written in haste and wonder by Moslem chroniclers who witnessed their destruction. If we turn up one of these accounts we find, for instance, that after pillaging Debra-Libanos and halting for a while at Lalibela, the invaders turned to go south again, discovering all too soon the mountainous region of Biet-Amhara—now Wollo—where numerous sanctuaries had been built by the Ethiopians, housing priceless treasures belonging to Church and State. The Moslem chronicle states that from afar they could see the gleaming gold that covered the tall church of the Holy Trinity, *Makana-Selassie*. They made their way to this vast sanctuary with its double encircling wall. There is no adequate description left to us of the architecture of this church, but it appears to have been a hundred cubits long, and broad by as much again, its summit being more than 150 feet from the ground. The whole of the interior, up to the ceiling, shone with gold and silver plaques inlaid with pearls and decorated with figures of various kinds. Not a moment was lost; the whole place was plundered and then burnt to the ground. The Emir, who was resting quietly in one of the three palaces close to the sanctuary, gazed upon the ruin with evident admiration: 'Is there anywhere', he



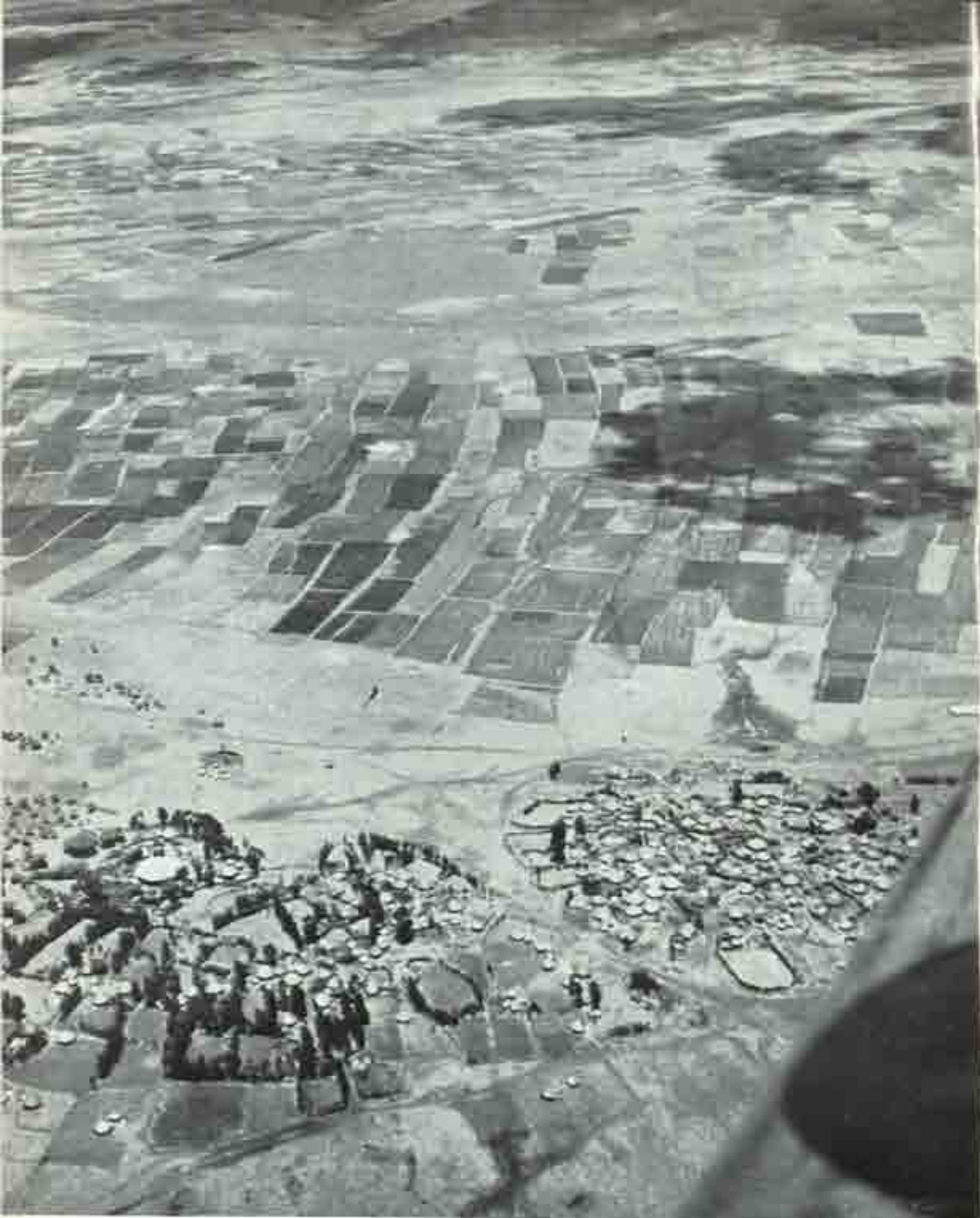
[100] Frontispiece to the *Authentic Report on the Lands of Prester John* (1540) published by Father Alvarez after his return from the embassy of 1520-6. The contents of this work are remarkable, but the introductory illustration is but one example of the countless flights of fancy to which the sovereign of Ethiopia was subjected by the West (Photo J. Doresse)



[61] Cross of wrought iron in the style of the ancient Portuguese cross. (Photo J. Dorese)



[62] Lake Ashangol. Great stretches of green land fringe the water on three sides, the pasture of countless flocks; while in the distance the peaceful surface of the lake reflects the mountain peaks. Its beauty has been compared with that of Lake Zug. It was in this region, on the plain of Ofala, that the Portuguese nobles pitched their camp during the rainy season of 1542, before the battle in which Don Christophe da Gama was wounded and taken prisoner. (Photo J. Dorese)



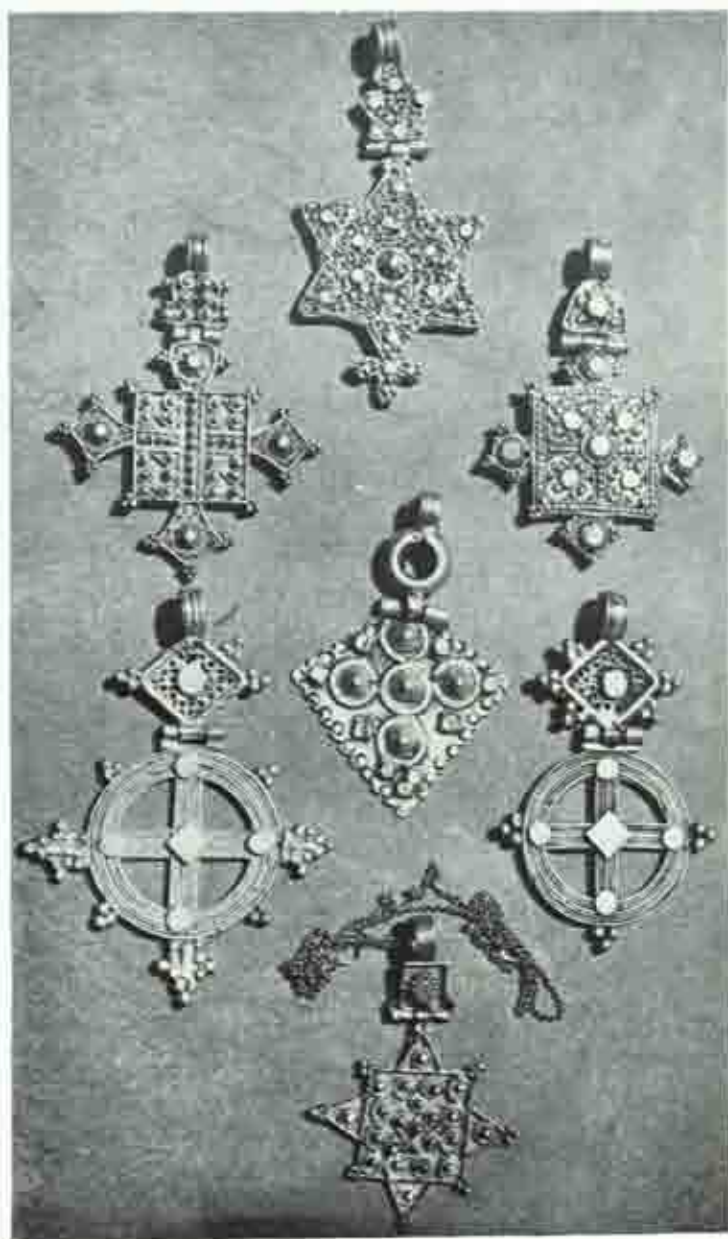
[63] Gojjam. This field mosaic of green, brown and beige, patterned by the clouds with violet shadows, is a corner of the Plateau of Gojjam near Debra Worq, the 'Golden Abbey.' But in spite of appearances, this province is in fact less fertile than Shoa. The village seen here, divided up by rows of stark trees, is clustered between the church with its large circular roof and the stream which is visible on the right. Gojjam came late into Ethiopian history; at the beginning of the sixteenth century its conversion to Christianity was still far from being finished. (Photo J. Dorisse)



[64] Aksum: Nineteenth century *Processional Cross*, made of silver. (Photo J. Döresse)



[65] Christ bearing His Cross, and Christ before Pilate. This painting, which was executed in 1929 at Addis, in the north of Goggam, was brought to France by the Mission Griaule. In accordance with an Ethiopian practice which is fairly commonly observed, the 'virtuous' are depicted full-face and the 'wicked' in profile. (Photo Musée de l'Homme)



[66] Silver Jewellery (2/5 natural size). (Photo J. Dorese)



[67] The Portuguese were intrigued to discover Africa, India, and Japan. But how did they strike the people they encountered? Unfortunately the Ethiopians have not left us their impressions on the matter. This Japanese screen, however, makes it possible to imagine what they must have looked like. It dates from 1551 and depicts in an amusing way the disembarkation of Duarte da Gama at Nagasaki on an official visit, accompanied by his retinue, to St. Francis-Xavier. This scene calls to mind the embassy to Prester John of 1520-1526, in which Father Alvarez took part. It also serves to illustrate details of the tall vessels such as anchored at Massawa in 1541, as well as the appearance of the four hundred nobles and soldiers who disembarked. (Photo Musée Guimet)



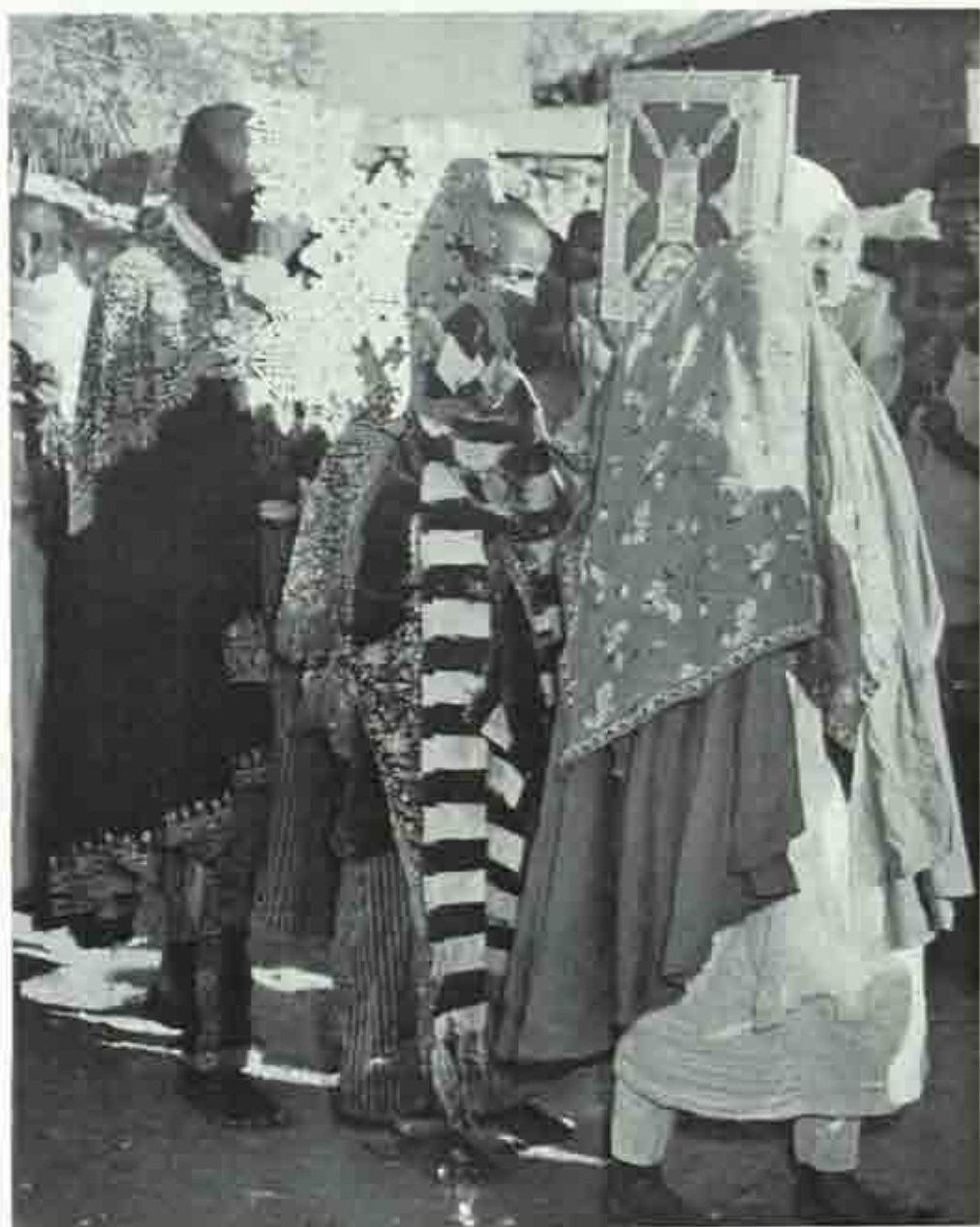
[68] The Palace of Gondar; Library founded by Emperor Tsadik Yohannes (1667-82).
(Photo Musée de l'Homme)

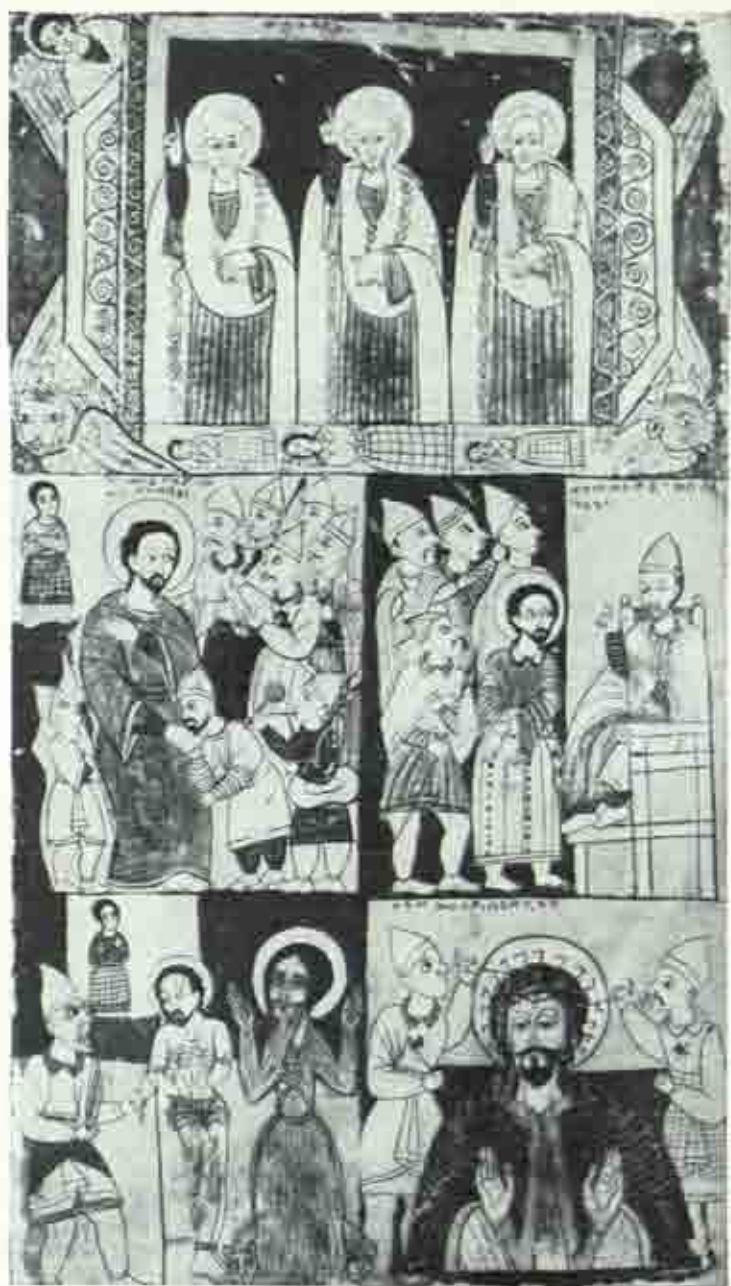


[69] Aksum: Attendants bearing crowns dedicated in the course of centuries to the Cathedral of Aksum by various Emperors. The diadem which appears in the foreground was an offering by H. M. Haile Selassie I on the occasion of his Imperial Coronation in 1950. The high crown, which has an almost Papal appearance, was consecrated by Menelik II after his victory at Adira. The other crowns, so far as the clergy at Aksum can remember, came from Emperors of Gondar. (Photo J. Daresse)

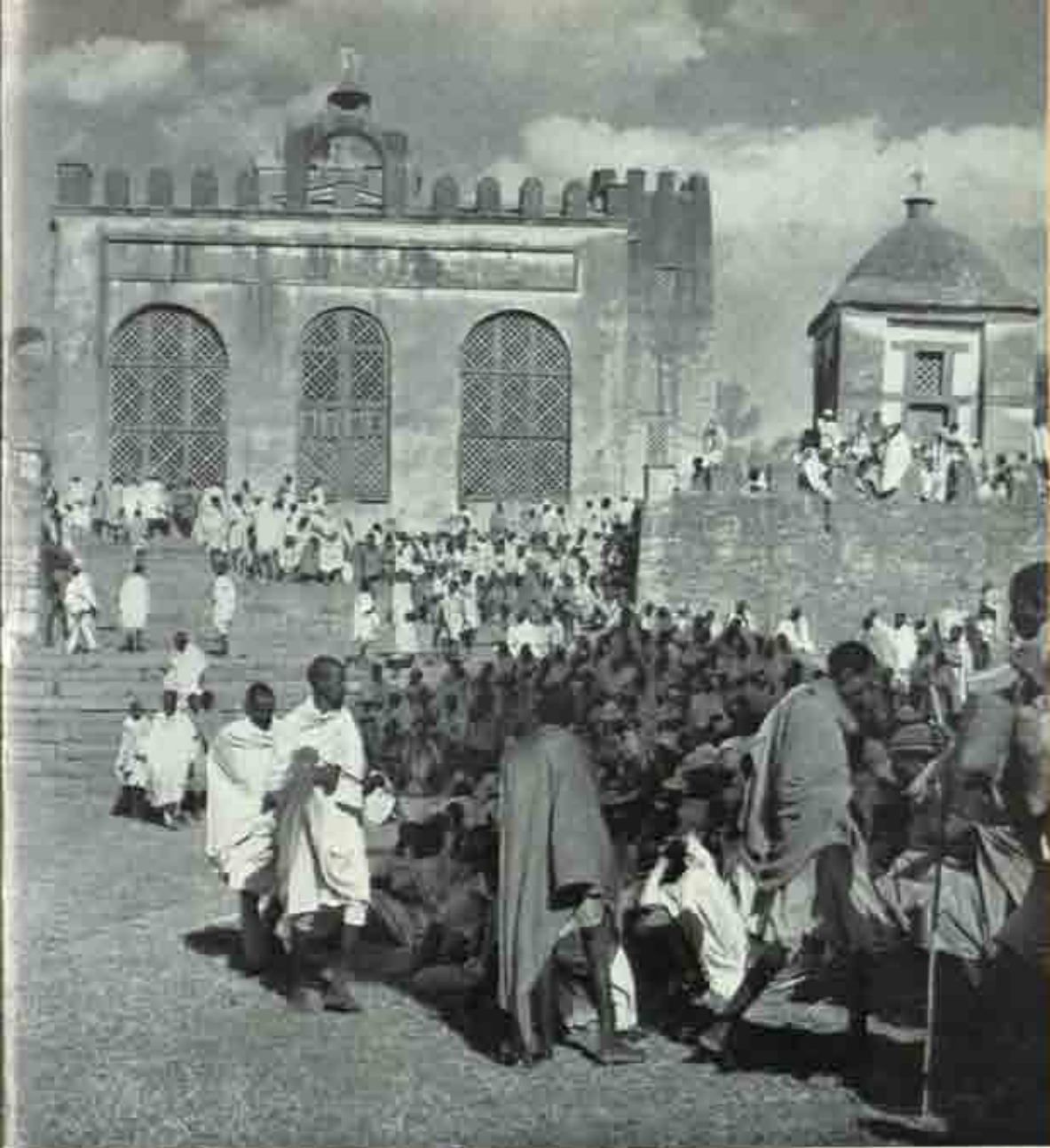


[70 and 70a] Aksum: Two views of the Procession which takes place on the Saturday before the Palm Festival. (Photo J. Doresse)





[71] A fairly modern painting depicting in the top register the Holy Trinity; below, the Kiss of Judas, and Jesus before Pilate; and in the lowest register the Chastisement, and Crowning with Thorns. In the scene second to last the painter has added the Ethiopian saint, Gelra-Manfas-Qeddus. (Photo Musée de l'Homme)



[72] Aksum; The Cathedral, on a Feast Day. In 1657 it was rebuilt by Fasiladas, and in 1749-50 Yaso II undertook its restoration; yet it bears the distinct hallmarks of sixteenth century colonial art acquired through the Portuguese. (Photo J. Doresse)



[73] Aloe growing in Tigre; (Photo J. Doresse)

[74] Aksum: Palm Festival. The chanters preparing for a sacred dance. (Photo J. Doresse)



asked his retinue, 'in the Byzantine Empire, in India, or in any other land, a building such as this, containing such figures and works of art?' Further on, the army reached the church of *Atronsa-Maryam*, 'Throne of Mary', which was empty. The four monks on guard were massacred. But everything had been hidden in a house nearby; it was quickly located and an entry forced, and soon the prayer-books, brocades, velvets and satins were being brought out, followed by more precious items such as censers and vases of gold. The plunderers seem to have been somewhat taken aback by a 'book of gold' which had figures of men, birds, and wild beasts. They went on to loot *Ganata-Maryam*, 'Paradise of Mary', where the royal insignia and treasure had been concealed, including contemporary crowns and the diadems of ancient kings, ceremonial mantles, girdles and daggers. They also found a number of *tabots*, a type of altar table peculiar to the Ethiopian Church, which were made of gold and were so heavy that five men together were unable to carry them. In short, they plundered the entire area from Lake Haik to Aksum and across to Lake Tana, killing as they went or converting by force, never stopping until the day their leader was slain and they fled; but by then there was nothing left to destroy.

The hour of their defeat was indeed imminent. Admittedly Gran had invaded Tigre, reunited the region of Kassala with the Moslem territory of Mazaga, and driven Lebna-Dengel from one province to the next. But the king, repenting, albeit rather late in the day, of his earlier self-sufficiency, sent a request for help to Portugal. In 1541, in response to this appeal, Portuguese troops came ashore in Ethiopia under Don Christofe da Gama. Lebna-Dengel was never to see the liberation they helped to bring about. He who twenty years before rode forth on horseback, crowned, and with an escort of chained lions, died twelve months before their arrival with hardly an attendant. He had fled exhausted to the monastery of Debra-Damo, haunted by his memories of defeat again and again in the field. It was his son Galawdewos, or Claudius (1540-1559), who was to reap the benefit of a victory already assured after thirteen months' campaigning, in the course of which the Portuguese forces swooped down upon the enemy.

These troops consisted of 400 volunteers, the pick of the army, with a leader 26 years old. At their disembarkation on 9 July 1541 they had been welcomed by the viceroy of Tigre, the *Bahr-Nagash*, and were at once conducted to Debarwa to await the end of the rainy season. They brought with them eight cannons, a hundred muskets, and an ample supply of side-arms.

On 12 December they started off for battle with a Tigrean force numbering two hundred, escorting Queen Sabla-Wangel, the unhappy widow of the late king, from Debra-Damo where she had awaited them. King Claudius was in Shoa; in order to reach him they were faced with a long and tedious march and numerous skirmishes with Moslem troops blocking the route, enough to drain half their available strength. The steep climb up towards Baraket necessitated shouldering the equipment, each man taking arms, munitions, and even artillery on his back for three days on end, a new experience for the Portuguese. After this they had to cross a mountainside held by the enemy, who attempted to bar their way. This encounter resulted in their first victory and they transformed the local mosque into a church which they called Our Lady of Victory. There they buried their gallant dead, who are commemorated to this day at this spot. At the beginning of April they reached the south of Makalle where they dug themselves in, having got within striking distance of the main enemy force. Two battles ensued in rugged country to the north of the Amba-Alagi, in the course of which the Moslems were put to flight, having been taken by surprise at the use of firearms, and the *Imam* was wounded. The booty they left behind them in their deserted camp enabled Don Christofe and his troops to replenish their equipment, not to speak of an even better prize: 'Amongst the many noble ladies remaining there was a wife of the Emir who was of great beauty, whom Don Christofe took for himself. . . .'

It was now the middle of April 1542. The rainy season was approaching, and the troops assembled on the verdant plain of Ofala, south of Lake Ashangi, to wait until it was over. Meanwhile, down in the low-lying scrubland of Zabel, Gran reorganized his army, adding 900 musketeers and ten cannons sent to him from Arabia by the Pasha of the Turks of Zebid. Soon afterwards, on 29 August, he began once more to advance through the mud and mist of the plateau, not waiting for the dry season, and with all the additional forces he had at his command succeeded in routing the Portuguese; of the latter only 200 were left to make their way back towards Semen, amongst them the Queen and the Catholic Patriarch Jean Bermudez. Don Christofe was wounded and had to stay behind. He was captured, recognized, tortured, and made a laughing-stock before being put to death and cut to pieces. Nearly a hundred years later his grave was discovered and his remains, which had acquired a saintly virtue, were taken back to Portugal. His mission, however, was all but fulfilled at the time of his death,

which was avenged by the Christians of Ethiopia. By October Claudius had managed to combine with his own forces what was left of the Portuguese, while Gran, thinking victory was already his, had dismissed his Turkish allies and settled down once more near Lake Tana. His men were taken by surprise at Waina Daga and decimated, and he himself was killed by a musket-ball. Deprived of their leader the Moslem army scattered and fled in the direction of distant 'Adal, to be pursued and hacked to pieces on the way.

Although the finer details of this historic period soon became blurred with the passage of time, the memory of its glory did not fade in Ethiopia. Only last century when the scholar Paulitschke was exploring in the neighbourhood of Harar, a chief of the Galla showed him a sword which was venerated by his tribe as having belonged, according to popular belief, to a great hero. Paulitschke recognized that it was a Portuguese sword, a rare survival from Don Christofe da Gama and his companions.

Ethiopia once more had undergone a severe ordeal, and this time her own forces had proved insufficient to defend and deliver her. The Moslem occupation had brought ruin on the country, not only in a material sense, but also morally, which was worse. Fifteen years of forcible conversion to Islam had taken its toll of the loyalty of certain subjects of the realm, who could never again, despite all attempts of the Church at a ceremonial rite of 'reconciliation', bring to the service of the Christian Empire a faith that was unadulterated and unswerving as in the past. But at the same time, as a kind of retribution, the Moslem army, after losing a war which had taxed its resources to the uttermost, was now faced on its own ground with the invasions of the Galla, a barbarous tribe which descended upon them in full force, and gradually overwhelmed them, in order to tackle the more resistant Christian provinces the more effectively.

The Sultanate, however, made a last bid for revenge before becoming totally engulfed. In this campaign the role of hero, or avenger of the *Imam*, was taken by Nur-ibn-al-Wazir at the instigation of Gran's widow, whom he was anxious to impress. It was he who built the wall which encircles Harar to this day. In response to his initial attacks the Ethiopians sacked the town; but nine years later he retaliated by an invasion of Fatajar. Claudius met him with an army reinforced by monks and church dignitaries who were not particularly well versed in warfare. The battle took place on Good Friday, an unlucky day in the view of the Christians, who fought badly. The King, perhaps, would have been less eager to enter the

fray had it not been for love of a woman who, according to the Chronicles, tried to restrain him from doing so. Claudius had taken her from her previous husband, who was a priest. Racked by remorse at what he had done, he flung himself into the thick of the battle and was promptly killed and beheaded. His head was taken to Harar and presented to the widow of the *Imam*, after which it was exhibited for three years on top of a pillar. After the youthful Don Christofe, Claudius was the second martyr from the struggle of Ethiopia against Islam. His defence of the faith was not confined to the battlefield; he built the beautiful church known as Tadbaba Maryam, or 'Dais of Mary', and was particularly famous for his writings, compiling the 'Confessions of Claudius' as an answer to those who accused him of secret leanings towards Catholicism.

Minas (1559-63) who succeeded him, had been held to ransom by the Moslems, who had taken him prisoner in the course of an earlier battle and had held him for many years at Harar. He inherited a knotty situation, not so much as a result of the temporary come-back of 'Adal which had cost the life of Claudius, but because two new foes had now appeared on the scene, the Galla tribes and the Turks. The latter had defeated the Sultan of Cairo in 1517, since when they had infested the Red Sea coasts, occupying the Yemen and the islands of Dahlak. In 1557 they began settling in Tigre, taking Massawa, Arkiko, and the fortress of Debarwa. The *pasha* Ozdemur even got as far as Debra-Damo, which he besieged, later occupying that sacred site, which always hitherto had been inviolable. The monks were massacred, the church desecrated and plundered. But the governor of Tigre succeeded in surprising and defeating the Ottoman troops as they were in process of settling in the Bur peninsula, later delivering a sharp admonition to Ga'ewa, the Moslem queen of the Mazaga, who had entered into an alliance with them.

The Galla tribes were pagans who appear to have come originally from the valleys of Wabi and Juba, and had already been infiltrating for some years past to the north and west, taking advantage of disturbances amongst the Somalis and encroaching wherever they could in the absence of the Moslems on their campaigns. At first they encountered no resistance to their gradual advance; but east of Lake Zwai, in the Bateramora district, there was eventually a clash with Ethiopian troops, whom they defeated. When further waves began to invade Dawaro and Fatajar between 1545 and 1547, Claudius had succeeded temporarily in diverting them towards Harar, which they destroyed, leaving misery and famine in their

wake. The attempt to check their advance was ineffectual; between 1562 and 1570 a number of Galla tribes reached the eastern end of the plateau and pushed forward into Angot, Amhara, and Begameder, whilst others occupied Wollega. The double onslaught of Turks and Gallas proved too much for Minas, and by the time of his death the viceroy of Tigre, who had revolted, was allied to the Turks at Massawa, while the Gallas had overrun a third of the Empire. Within the space of fifty years Ethiopia had suffered more invasions than ever before.

During the reigns of Lebna-Dengel and Claudius the country's great buildings and countless treasures disappeared in a welter of destruction. Famous monasteries, containing large numbers of manuscripts forming the bulk of the nation's literature, were annihilated. A few only were spared, such as Debra-Damo, the inaccessible Gunda-Gundet far below in an unsalubrious valley to the east of Adigrat, the convent of Na'adir south of Aksum, and one or two retreats on Lake Tana or Lake Zwai. But creative activity did not come to an end, and new writings were soon appearing as before, the most important of which were the work of one 'Enbakom or Habakkuk. This writer was a former Moslem trader who had entered Ethiopia and been converted to Christianity, eventually attaining the rank of *Etchage* or chief of the Ethiopian monastic communities. He justified his conversion and denounced Islam in a work entitled *Ankasa Amin*, 'The Gate of Faith'. To him also we owe the translation of *Baralam and Yewasef*, an edifying text of Byzantine origin. A vast amount of historical literature dates from this period, including a lengthy Arabic account of the campaigns of Gran, written by one of the *Imam's* followers, the first Portuguese descriptions of Ethiopia, and also some excellent Geez chronicles relating to the reigns of Lebna-Dengel, Claudius, and Minas.

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Ethiopia was still hemmed in all round by her enemies, but within the Christian enclave, her national territory, she continued to develop, and one by one her adversaries for the most part gradually disintegrated or withdrew. That the danger had begun to diminish is already evident in the reign of Sarsa-Dengel (1563-97), a ruler who is revealed as a great conqueror, vigorous and undaunted in the face of peril, and certainly worthy of the many eulogies contained in the lengthy and detailed chronicle drawn up in the course of his reign. He was confronted with a realm of shifting frontiers and devastated towns and villages; nothing resembling a city, and

nothing that could offer accommodation fit for an emperor. The life of the sovereign had to be divided between military quarters that in the dry season were constantly changing and huge camping-grounds set up each year in a different place to rest the army until the end of the rainy season.

The early years of his reign were to some extent disturbed, as in the case of nearly all his successors, by a coalition of nobles who attempted to put another king on the throne in the hopes that he would prove more amenable; but Hamalmal, Harbo, Fasilo, and Yeshaq fell out among themselves. At first Sarsa-Dengel was obliged to flee before them, but he was able to eliminate them one by one and, with the army firmly under his control at last, restored his kingdom to order and set about tackling his external foes. In order to strengthen his defences against the Galla tribes, he subdued the southern provinces, hacking to pieces the Moslem cavalry which had been the pride and joy of the prince of Hadya; not a man, nor a horse, nor a shred of armour remained. Then he turned on the Moslems of 'Adal, who were seeking an alliance with Yeshaq, the most dangerous of all his rivals, whose practised cunning had resulted in his winning from the king the governorship of Tigre. In the Wabi district he wiped out the army newly formed from Harar, thereby ending once and for all the military power of that great Moslem city. The Sultanate, stripped of its defences, was obliged to remove to the heart of the desert region of Dankali near the Awssa Lakes where it was less subject to attack from the Galla; here for another hundred years they waged a losing battle before their final extinction. Only the city of Harar, which became independent, has survived to the present day out of all the vast kingdom of 'Adal, whose once numerous towns now lie in ruins in the Somali desert.

But Yeshaq had succeeded in forming a more important alliance with the all-powerful Turks. He even had the effrontery to inform his royal master of this pact in an insolent message: 'I have made peace with the Pasha', he wrote, 'not by messenger as is the custom, but by seating myself by his side on the same carpet'. To this challenge the Emperor replied in 1578 by a lightning campaign whose strategy vividly recalls, as Conti-Rossini has pointed out, that led by Menelik II in 1896 in almost identical circumstances. He debouched suddenly into Tembien, defeating the Turks and the Tigreans at Addi-Koro. Yeshaq was killed at the onset of the battle. The Pasha, whose armour was inlaid with gold, brandished his sword and javelin, but before he could make use of them he was

slain. Both heads were taken to the king, who mockingly placed them on view side by side on sumptuous drapery, so that everyone said 'Yeshaq has obtained his heart's desire, his head is with the Pasha's on the same carpet!' Shortly afterwards the fortress of Debarwa surrendered unconditionally. Its towers were overthrown, its mosques razed to the ground. On his way back, Sarsa-Dengel was able to celebrate at Aksum the magnificent coronation ceremony which no king since Zara-Yaqob had been able to carry out. The chronicle records that a great throng of priests and chanters came in procession before the sovereign bearing crosses of gold, silver censers, and embroidered parasols, and after them came all the superiors of the monasteries of Tigre and Shire, marching to the sound of sacred songs accompanied by the drums, and clad in gaily patterned chasubles covered with spangles and embroidery. Then Sarsa-Dengel, having been welcomed in the traditional manner by the daughters of the city, who asked him certain questions according to the rites, cut the thread that barred his way close to the ancient stele of Ezana, and proceeded to the 'Throne of David', where he was crowned and given his throne name of *Malak-Sagad*, 'The Kings Adored Him'.

To Aksum and its neighbouring churches he gave lands and precious goods before he departed. He then took the road to Lake Tana, whence he was to deliver a series of further blows against sundry political adversaries. The Galla tribes, who had penetrated into Dambeya, were repulsed. Twice he campaigned against the Falasha, who from the rugged heights of their formidable *ambas* in the Semen area fought to the death; in defeat, rather than be taken prisoner, men and women alike flung themselves over the precipice. In the eyes of his subjects Malak-Sagad won special esteem for his campaigns into the Sudan where he fought the Nilotic Shankalla tribes, hitherto unconquered, even the great Gran having had to withdraw before the savagery of their attacks. They were natural warriors, living naked, often painting their bodies red and white, and fighting with spear and shield; but their deadliest weapons were their terrifying slings and poisoned arrows. Now for the first time they were defeated, and they surrendered. Finally, the king secured Ethiopian authority over the highly prosperous kingdom of Enarya by implanting Christianity there. The inhabitants had previously made sacrificial offerings of meat to the vulture and practised divination, but the king, Badautcho, allowed himself to be persuaded of the vanity of such practices; both he and his people were baptized, and churches were built for them in every village.

[7] Ethiopia from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century.

During these six hundred years of her history Ethiopia occupied an isolated position on her high plateau-land, hemmed in between three very different worlds. To the east lay the Semiticised regions of the Red Sea and the Yemen, linked by maritime traffic with the Mediterranean fringe and with the Orient, and by caravan with Mesopotamia and Syria over the desert tracks of Arabia. Westward lay the Sudan and Nubia, the lands of the Nile, once Christian and now under Islam; through these territories lay the route to Egypt. To the south and south-east stretched the pagan realms of Black Africa. In antiquity the eastern deserts lying below the Ethiopian Massif were less barren. Elephants were hunted there; and according to Artemidorus the banks of the water-courses yielded myrrh, incense and cinnamon. There were Moslem tribes living there up to the sixteenth century. Their overthrow brought to an end the prosperity of the area, whose economic development had certainly endangered Ethiopia's political and religious independence for several centuries. The expansion of the Empire which took place under Menelik II is not shown in this map, which concerns the period during which Ethiopia largely consisted of mountains and plateaux rent by deep uninhabited valleys. Towns and villages were strung out some six thousand feet up, along the great communication routes which characterized the political and economic development of the country. From the ancient regions of the Aksumite Empire these routes crossed the Amba-Alagi and arrived on the plains of Shoa by way of Lake Ashangi, Lasta, and the mountains of Amhara. Other tracks led to Begameder and Gojjam. There were also the peripheral caravan routes, leading to Shoa and Enderta from the coast or taking large numbers of merchants and pilgrims to the Sudan and Egypt by way of Setit, Metemma, or Kassala.

After this peace reigned on most fronts, A Turkish force which with the help of a Tigrean chief had occupied Debarwa was ejected. In order to oust the Ottomans for good, Malak-Sagad besieged their last remaining base, the port of Arkiko. He did not succeed in capturing it, but the Pasha, in 1589, decided to negotiate for a settlement, sending him in token of his goodwill a large number of gifts including a horse whose saddle and harness were made of gold.

The days of temporary royal encampments were nearly over. At first the king had tried out various possibilities for shelter during the rainy season, from the pleasant shores of Lake Tana to the hills of Shoa, his favourite haunts being Gend Barat and Endagabtan. Then, year after year, he took to the sunny green slopes of the hills surrounding Lake Tana; and finally after 1571 resorted fairly regularly to Guba'e or 'Enfraz in that area, where he built the castle of Guzara. At 'Ayba, to the north, in the Wagara region, he also had a palace built, and founded a church, *Kidane-Mehret*, or 'Covenant of Mercy'. Thus the founding of Gondar, which was the work of Fasiladas, was anticipated by some sixty years.

The crowning achievements of Malak-Sagad lay in his expeditions against the heathen Gambo tribes and the Galla. In 1597, for the last time, he set off once more to suppress a revolt in Damot. He fell ill, as a result, so the Chronicle informs us, of eating a certain fish found in the river Galila, the monks having warned him that no good would come of it. On his return home he died. After a reign of thirty-five years he had expelled the Turks, checked the advance of the Galla, extended the kingdom once more as far as Kaffa, conquered the Agawmeder, and paved the way for the eventual pacification of Semen. His kingdom, liberated for a time at least from its external enemies, would have had a chance of peace and consolidation had not religious controversy during the reign of his successor become so violent that for many years the Ethiopians themselves were split into two camps in a deadly rivalry which effectively halted for some considerable time the progress which had been begun.

VII

THE RENAISSANCE IN ETHIOPIA

ON the death of Malak-Sagad there was a prolonged struggle for succession to the throne from which Susenyos, who had already distinguished himself by sheer force of personality, eventually emerged victorious. As a child he had fallen into the hands of a Galla chief who brought him up for a time as his own son, until he was finally rescued. He therefore had fairly close ties with the Galla community and made good use of them in furthering his own career. In adolescence Susenyos had been fortunate enough to escape the customary lot of the royal princes who could be said to have any claim to the throne; they were usually shut up in the stoutly fortified monastery at Geshena, where they formed quite a colony. Susenyos had been with the late Emperor, Sarsa-Dengel, on his last expedition, from which he had returned on the point of death. The young prince had the wit to escape forthwith, while the notables set Jacob on the throne in the hope that since he was still a child he would present no problems. Susenyos took refuge for a time with monks of Gojjam and Shoa, from whom he no doubt received valuable instruction, and for a time with the Galla, from whom he drew his first armies. Instead of wasting time on fruitless claims to the succession he had begun by winning over that section of borderland country which in time was to secure his supremacy over almost the whole of the realm. With the help of his Galla allies he gradually brought Shoa and Bizamo under his control, held the Moslem governors to ransom, and took over Walaka, Merabieti, and 'Ifat. He thus came near to securing the throne with far less difficulty than Jacob, who in spite of his youth had been putting up a spirited resistance to his tyrannical nobles. Susenyos now entered the struggle, only to find himself worsted and sent into exile on the grounds of paganism and magic practices.

His turn had not yet come; Za-Dengel was chosen to be king. Za-Dengel possessed exceptional intelligence and strength of character, with the kind of courage that enabled him in the midst of battle, when his men had broken ranks, to dismount and stand in the face of the enemy, rallying by his example all who had taken to

flight. But Za-Dengel had leanings towards Catholicism; he was excommunicated by the *Abuna*, Petros, driven out by the nobles, and despite the loyal support of troops who were descended from the Portuguese, he was eventually left dead upon the battlefield, without burial.

Who was to be the next to receive the royal regalia? Susenyos had by now succeeded in making enough allies amongst the notables to be offered in December, 1604, at Mertula-Maryam, the crown and royal vestments, and the canopy of State. But Jacob had been recalled by other members of the nobility and once more ascended the throne. Did Susenyos accordingly withdraw, agreeing to accept payment in compensation? His answer was dignified and to the point: 'Even if our late Emperor Malak-Sagad, who was greater than all the rest, were to return from the dead this day, I would not forsake that which has been entrusted to me by God, nor would I take from my head the crown that has been placed upon it.'

The two emperors had therefore no option but to resolve their conflict by force of arms. Jacob's most powerful ally, Za-Selassie, was promptly defeated and he surrendered. Then Jacob himself was utterly routed in Gojjam. Susenyos at once took up residence at Guba'e, and in 1608, clothed in purple damask, with a golden chain about his neck, he was crowned with due solemnity at Aksum.

His campaigns against foreign adversaries met with swift success. On several fronts he was able to keep the Galla in check, and skilfully brought about the assimilation of a large section of these people, amongst whom he had found his first supporters. He fought against the Agaw, and put down a revolt led by Gideon, king of the Falasha. He made war also on the powerful Moslem state belonging to the Fung tribe which had not long since superseded the Christian province of 'Alwa in the Sudan. One of the Empire's most vital trading routes lay across this area. Now, relations with one of the first sultans of the Fung, Ba'adi by name, had been somewhat sour. Amongst other costly gifts, Susenyos had sent him golden bracelets; and since bracelets were a symbol of servitude, Ba'adi had replied with the insulting offering of two aged horses, both blind and lame. In response came a series of devastating onslaughts led by Susenyos.

But during this reign religious problems came to the fore and led to a conflict which was more momentous than any foreign war.

The influence of some 160 Portuguese who survived the expedition of Don Christofe da Gama, men of high rank who had possessed great wealth and estates, had by no means been negligible. Most of them doubtless soon produced families of some consequence,

but their descendants, apart from being Catholics, seem to have been hardly distinguishable from the Ethiopians, adopting their mode of dress, language, and customs. Yet in spite of their numerical inferiority, the work of subsequent missions did much to augment their influence, particularly after the arrival of the Patriarch André de Oviedo in 1557. Had it not been agreed, when Lebna-Dengel had appealed to the Portuguese for help, that the country should gradually be converted? The Jesuit fathers accordingly began to maintain houses at Fremona near Adowa, in Gojjam, and near Lake Tana. Father Paez, a man of heroic stature who showed remarkable ability in the work of conversion, became extraordinarily conversant not only with the Ethiopian language but with the mentality of the people, but he was by no means the only one to master both the written and spoken language of the country. *Amharic* was employed for preaching and had also begun to be used for Biblical and theological commentaries or controversial writings that thus became available to the public. There had been violent storms over this from the first; in the reign of Claudius there had been a public outcry demanding that the new books should be burnt. The Emperor, without giving in on this issue, had nevertheless always been completely orthodox in his own views as expressed in his writings, to the satisfaction of all who belonged to the Church of Alexandria. Later, as we have seen, Za-Dengel's conversion to Catholicism brought down on his head a storm of opposition which resulted in his downfall. Yet amongst large numbers of the nobility there was no lack of response to the Jesuits, who had the knack of putting over their religion in a way people could understand, instructing them in the architectural skills which since the destruction of the great churches of Amhara had been virtually forgotten, and enriching religious paintings by their expressive rendering of the portraits of Christ and the saints. Admittedly there were those who objected and tried to counteract the heresy of Latin refinement by orthodox paintings in the crude 'Egyptian' style. But the latest Coptic Metropolitan bishops, partly because they had taken an unseemly part in internal political struggles, and even more because their own discipline had become rather more lax, raised their hands in horror at anyone who ventured to criticize the Roman fathers, whose dignified way of life, strict asceticism, and learning were apparent to all. In 1613 Susenyos made up his mind to fulfil the pledge thought to have been made by his predecessors, and to be admitted to the Latin Church. The difficulty was how to send the necessary communication to this effect, since the Red Sea

route was not practicable. Father Antonio Fernandez immediately proposed going overland to Melinde on the Zambesi delta where there were Portuguese settlements, a frightful journey of some 2,500 miles across unknown territory which would be enough to daunt anyone these days, yet to a Portuguese of that period there was nothing special about it. He managed to get as far as Kaffa with his companions, to find the inhabitants, as in the days of Aksum, bartering their gold for salt, livestock, and clothing from the north. On reaching strange kingdoms where witchcraft was practised by mysterious dark-skinned African kings, they were obliged to turn back. But in spite of this setback to a somewhat unusual enterprise, in spite of all his opponents who tried to get him publicly excommunicated at the hands of the *Abuna*, in spite of the numerous attacks that were made on the Jesuits, such as the pamphlet which described them as the 'Kin of Pilate', Susenyos did not falter in his purpose. He began by banning observance of the Sabbath. In 1621 he went to Father Paez for confession, thus demonstrating his conversion to the Catholic faith. This was later publicly announced at Aksum in a solemn proclamation before the elders, many of whom were already converted to the Roman religion.

But Ethiopia revolted against a foreign religion being compulsorily introduced whether anyone liked it or not. It would have been better to have done it by gradual stages, but the Patriarch Mendez, successor to André de Oviedo, imposed immediate measures which were so uncompromising as to be unacceptable. All Christian Ethiopians had to be rebaptized, and every church reconsecrated, their traditional *tabots*, or Arks, being prohibited. The ancient liturgy in Geez, so highly revered, was forthwith discarded in favour of the Latin Mass, which no one understood; the cult of the Ethiopian saints was denounced, many of their remains being disinterred and flung out of the sanctuaries. Terrifying sanctions were imposed on dissenters, who had their tongues cut out or were burnt at the stake or hanged, measures which in due course brought about a widespread revolt. The behaviour of the Coptic bishops at this time had certainly been quite enough to justify a reformation of some kind. The corruption of Markos, Christodoulos and his concubines, rape and adultery on the part of Petros and Simon, all these were public scandals, a stain on the life of the community. But the sweeping away of all the religious traditions of the country was not to be tolerated. The revolt became a civil war. In Gojjam already, in 1621, Ras Se'ala Krestos, who was a prominent Catholic, had massacred a rebel throng which comprised a number of monks. Now

there were armies marching against the king, led by Melka-Krestos, their ranks swollen by hardy mountaineers from Lasta. The Emperor's troops were at first unwilling to advance against this mass display of determination on the part of their own kinsmen. They were perfectly prepared to fight to the death to save the Empire, but refused to do so for a foreign faith. Susenyos finally agreed to their terms and his army returned victorious; at Wainadega they completely defeated a force of 25,000. But the ground was littered with 8,000 dead: 'The men you see strewn upon the earth were neither pagans nor Moslems', said Fasiladas to his father the king, ' . . . They were your own subjects, your compatriots, some of them your kinsmen . . . This is no victory that we have gained. . . .' The Patriarch Mendez once more bade Susenyos defend the Latin faith to which he had pledged himself, but the king refused to have any further bloodshed for the sake of a cause his people would die rather than submit to. He did not betray his own profession of faith to the Catholic Church, but preferred to abdicate in favour of his son on 14 June, 1632, issuing a proclamation delivering the country at long last from evil oppression: 'Oyez! Oyez! Originally we gave you the Roman faith thinking it to be a good one. But countless men because of it have gone to their death: Yolyos, Gabriel, Takla-Giyorgis, and now a multitude of peasants. Now therefore we restore to you the Faith of your ancestors. Let the clergy return to the churches and set up their own altars for the Sacrament; let the people follow their own Liturgy, and may their hearts be glad!'

So ended this uprising against the Church of Rome, with the result that subsequent efforts to introduce reforms, however moderate, were badly handicapped; yet the Church of Ethiopia stood in grave need of reformation in respect of both morals and hierarchy if it was to recover its prestige and power.

Nevertheless the reign of Susenyos undoubtedly accomplished a good deal. Ethiopia, although remote from the Western world with its problems, had also lately undergone a twofold crisis, a Renaissance and a Reformation. Whether by chance or by destiny, the course of events had served to indicate the measure of agreement or otherwise in spiritual matters with Christian communities elsewhere. These two great movements produced in Ethiopia much that came to have a lasting value. One of the minor consequences was a great revival in Geez literature, which had already begun in the time of Susenyos's predecessors. A new apocryphal work appeared, entitled 'Visions', and attributed to the Coptic monk Shenuteh, though large

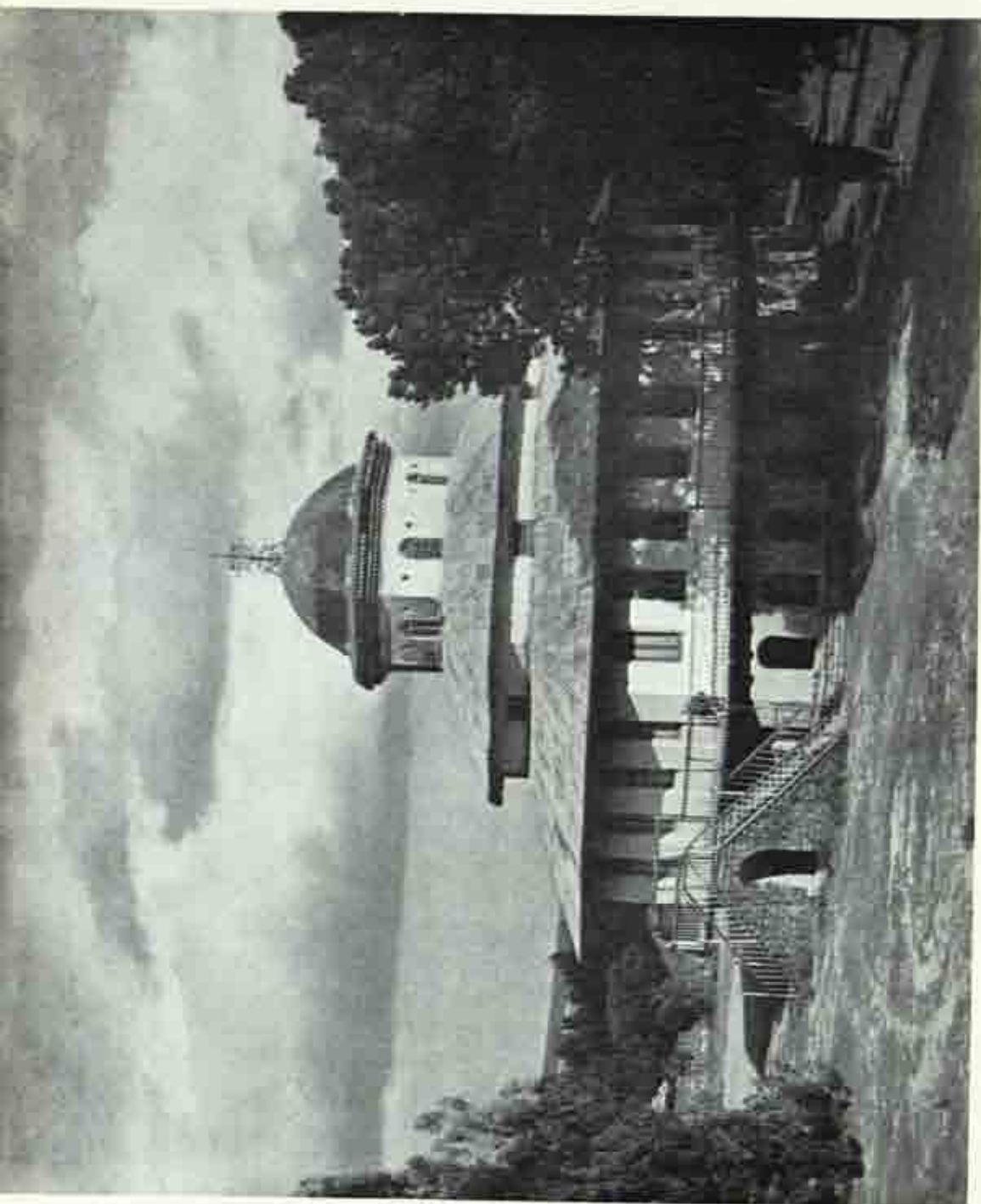
sections of it were undoubtedly Ethiopian in origin, with a strong element of anti-Catholicism. The lengthy Coptic 'Chronicle' by Jean de Nikiu was translated at this time, and also the great encyclopaedia of theology and ascetism entitled *Book of Hawi*. According to some scholars it was during this period that the *Fetha-Nagast* was compiled, the work relating to canonical law. The official chronicles were of course continued and enlarged; there was certainly no shortage of material.

But a more important development, occurring in the face of the literary works in Geez, was the establishment of Amharic by the Jesuits as a written language to be used for scholarly works destined to raise the level of religious discussion amongst the Ethiopians. Fine arts, such as paintings and illuminations, began to take on new, essentially Ethiopian forms, whether as a result of Latin influence or as a reaction against it, departing from the more rigid Coptic style and becoming freer and more expansive. Buildings were constructed of a type rarely seen hitherto, except perhaps for one or two churches such as that of Mertula-Maryam. The church of Guogora, for instance, was a new departure, with its heavily ornamented interior carved in rococo style, and that of Bareay-Gemb with its lofty cupola, built on rather more Coptic lines. Palaces were also built, such as the imperial residence of Guzara at 'Enfraz, and those of 'Azazo and Guogora. These architectural achievements were of course mainly the work of the Jesuit Fathers who not only designed the buildings but, like Paez, laboured with their own hands to construct them. But they were the forerunners of the city of Gondar, which came soon after; this was indeed the birthplace of a more original type of art, where in contrast to medieval custom in Ethiopia the civil and administrative buildings used by the king were in no way inferior to the religious constructions.

There is another tribute which should be paid to Susenyos. Besides bringing about certain civil reforms and furthering the cause of justice throughout his kingdom, his reign was one of great splendour. In the official records there are graphic descriptions of the Imperial Army in procession, headed by the flag and kettle-drums, with swordbearers and fusiliers marching before the holy image of Christ Crowned with Thorns, which was known as the *Kuer'ata Re'su*, and always borne aloft into battle; next, the King and his escort of military generals, umbrella-bearers, and grooms with shields; and lastly in their serried ranks a multitude of infantry and horsemen. These were the men who followed Susenyos into battle against the legitimate enemies of Ethiopia, enabling him to extend



[75] Nineteenth century representation of a battle between Ethiopian armies. (Photo: Musée de l'Homme)



[76] The Church of Entotto-Raguel. At first Menelik II sought to establish his capital at Entotto on the site of the mediaeval imperial residence. But it was a hill that received the full force of the wind, and after a few years the city moved to a more suitable setting lower down and became Addis Ababa. Of the former residence there remain a few abandoned buildings and two churches, one of which, dedicated to the Archangel Raguel, is shown here. It was completed in about 1897. (Photo J. Doresse)



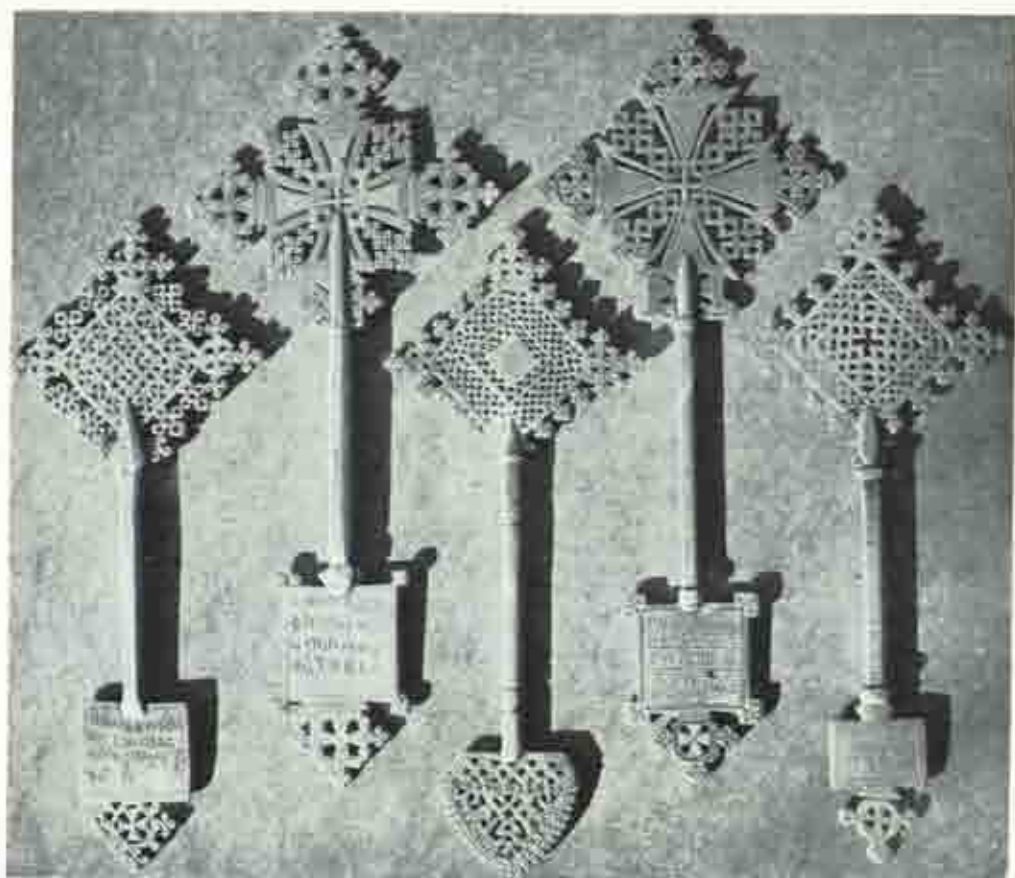
[77] Silver medal struck for the Imperial Coronation of H.M. Haile Selassie I in 1930. The Imperial monogram appears on the reverse side. (Photo J. Doresse)



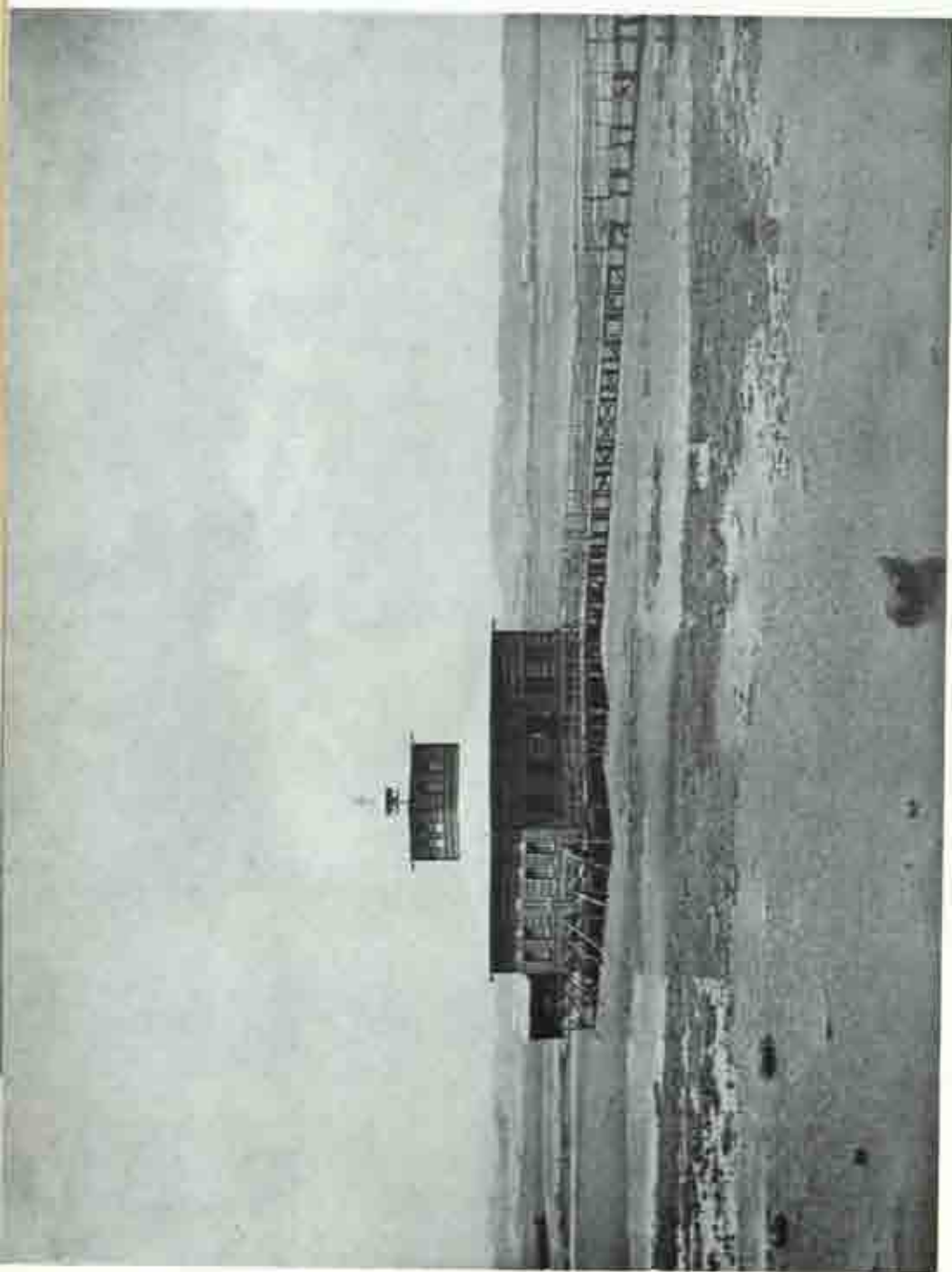
[78] Ataya, south of Dessie; Young Galla girls. (Photo J. Doresse)



[79] Amba Basilios, the present Metropolitan Bishop of the Ethiopian Church, was consecrated at Cairo by the Coptic Patriarch in January 1951. He is shown here just after the ceremony, between two Egyptian bishops.



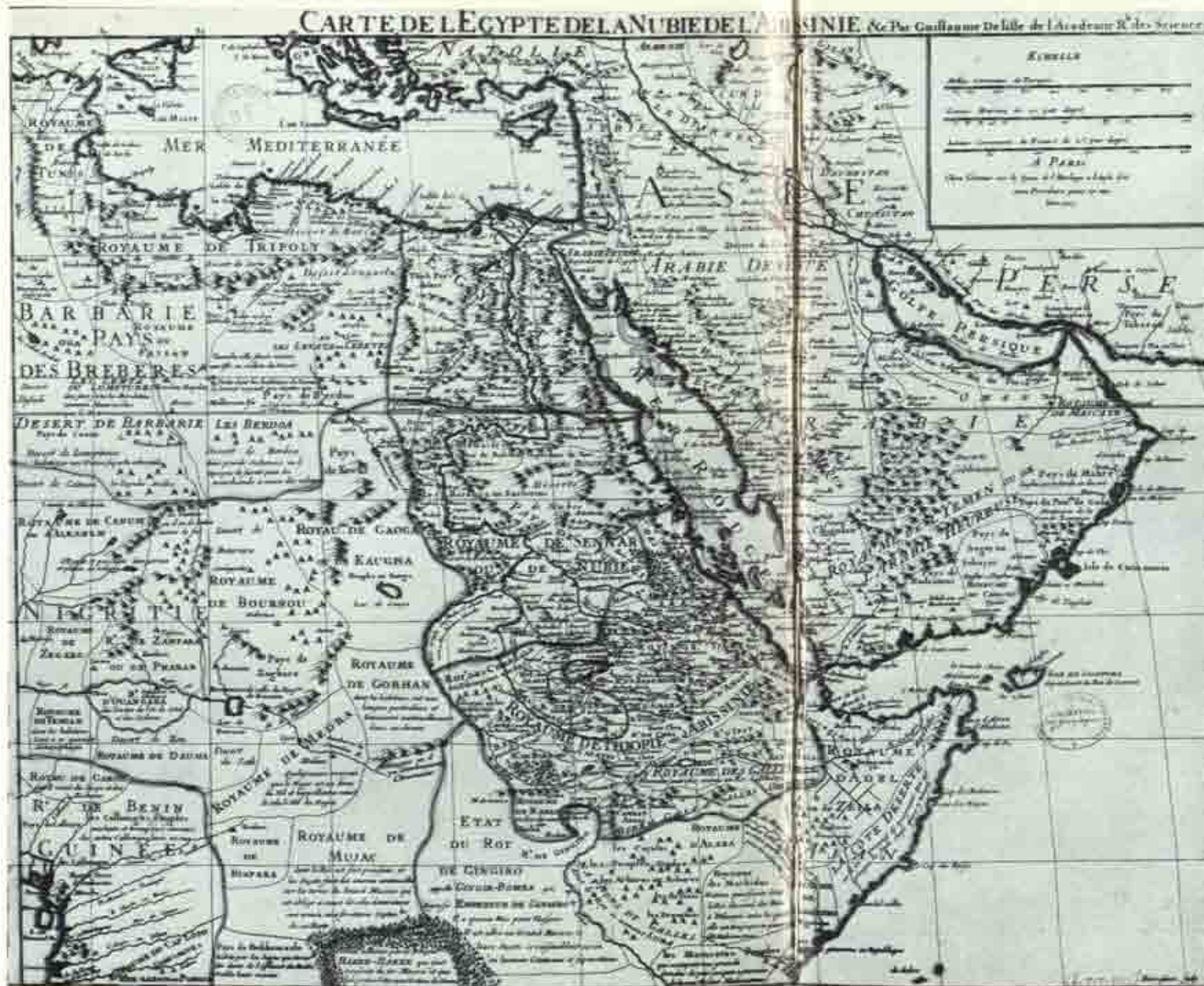
[80] Examples of the silver cross which every priest carries in his hand. (One-third natural size.) (Photo J. Doresse)



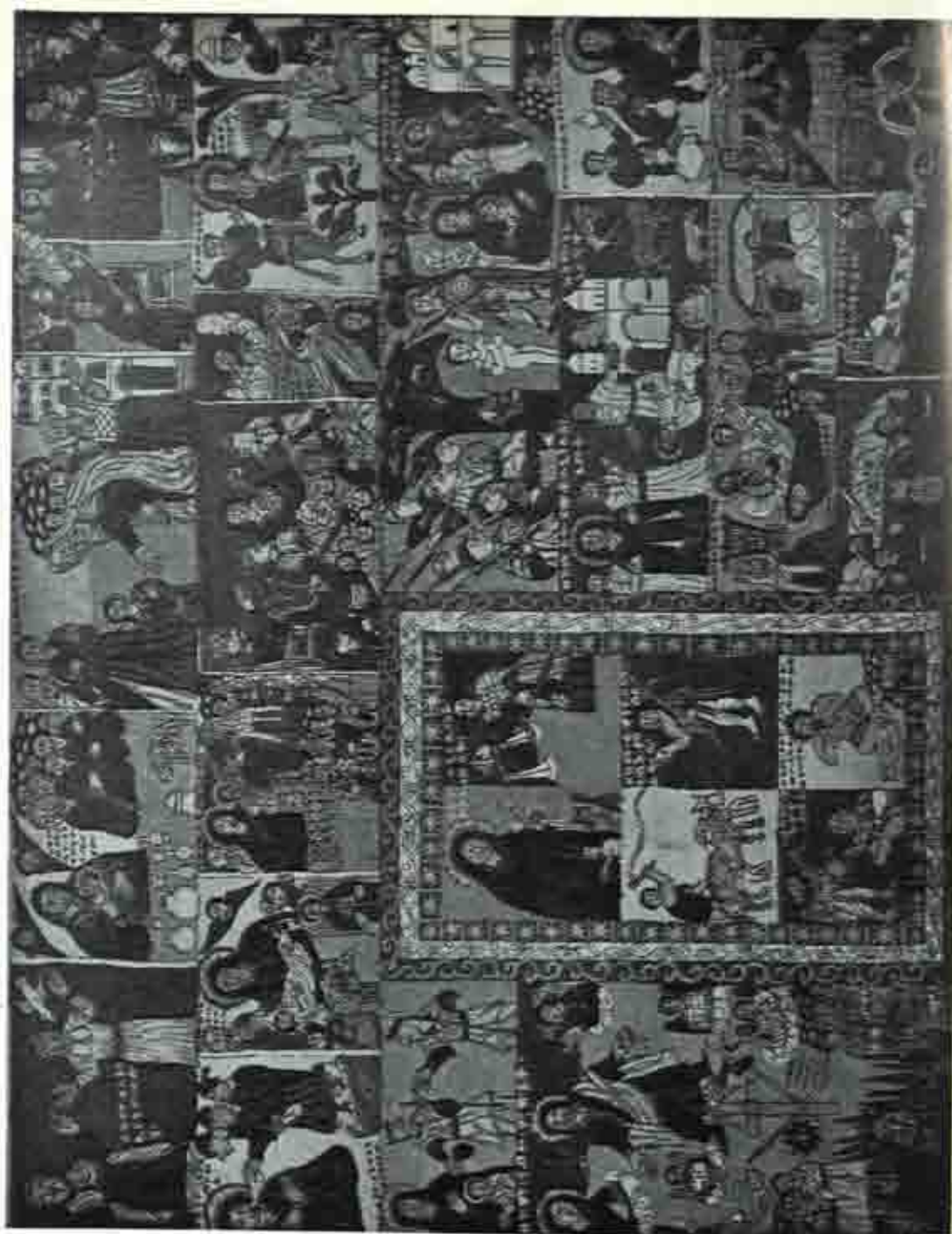
[81] Massawa: The Port of Massawa, relatively unimportant in antiquity, began to develop after the downfall of Adulis, some thirty miles further south. It was here that the Portuguese disembarked. Later, it fell into the hands of the Turks. The picture, taken in shimmering heat, shows an Ethiopian church built out over the lagoon; it is made of wood and brightly painted in green and yellow. (Photo F. Doyenne)



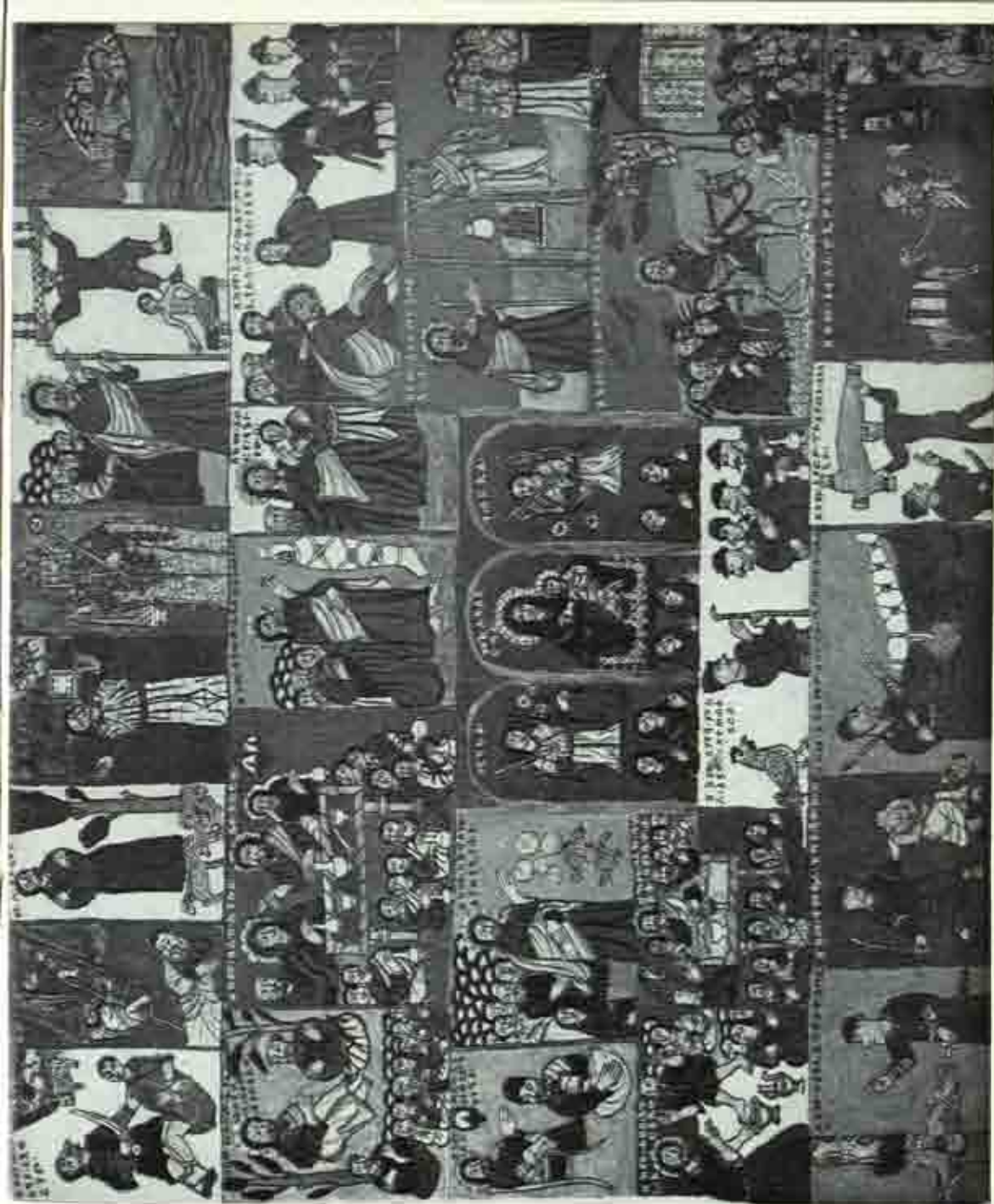
[82] Christ, Lord of the Universe: a seventeenth or eighteenth century painting. Below, the Entombment of Christ. The inscription, restored in places, reads: "This picture is the property of Prince Temerta Krestos and his wife Amata Yasus. The painter is Walda-Maryam". It was acquired in Gondar in 1952 by the Dakar-Djibouti Mission. (Photo Musée de l'Homme)



[85] Map of Egypt, Nubia, and Abyssinia, by G. Delille. Several editions of this were published early in the eighteenth century. Among other sources used was the map drawn by the Jesuit Father D'Almeida in 1655, after his sojourn in Ethiopia. Many places are still wrongly sited, but the map is interesting in view of the African kingdoms mentioned in the neighbourhood of Ethiopia and the details of imperial provinces which, in accordance with travellers' tales, are enumerated with a certain extravagance. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[84 and 85] The four walls of the inner sanctuaries of the churches are covered with countless scenes in traditional decorative style. A modern painter from Gondar has reproduced in vivid colours the south aspect (left) and east aspect (right) of such a sanctuary. The south wall is consecrated to the *History of the Virgin*. In the upper register are scenes showing Anne and Joachim, the Birth of the Virgin, her Childhood, and the Annunciation. Below this are depicted the Nativity, the Adoration of the Kings and Shepherds, the Massacre of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt. At the bottom, to the left of the door, Christ glorified triumphs over Hell. On the right the two lower registers tell the story of the death of the Virgin, her interment and her glorification in Heaven. On the door is depicted the Ethiopian story of Belay the Cannibal. He can be seen at the bottom in the act of devouring human beings, but also is shown giving water to a leper. Above, he is seen approaching a labourer whom he has earmarked as his next victim. Finally, in the top scene, he has just died; he is judged by St. Michael and is about to be released to the demon



who is already after his soul, but the Virgin intercedes and saves him on account of the single act of charity he once performed. The eastern wall depicts episodes from the Old and New Testaments, and the—apocryphal—acts of certain apostles. First, at the top, comes the Sacrifice of Abraham, Jacob's Ladder, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron; then the paralytic healed by Jesus and the Tempest Stilled. Below, the Nuptials of Cana may be recognized, along with the Resurrection of Lazarus and the Woman taken in Adultery. Lower still, is a panel representing the Virgin surrounded by angels, surmounting the Denial of St. Peter. To the left of this, the Loaves and Fishes, the Washing of the Feet, and the Last Supper. On the right are Jesus and the Samaritan at the Well of Jacob, and the Entry into Jerusalem. In the lowest register we see the crucifixion of St. Peter, the execution of St. Paul, St. Bartholomew thrown into the water, St. Thomas carrying his own skin after being flayed alive, and finally an episode from the life of St. Thaddeus.

(Photo Musée de l'Homme)



[86] The Ascension, from a fifteenth century manuscript. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



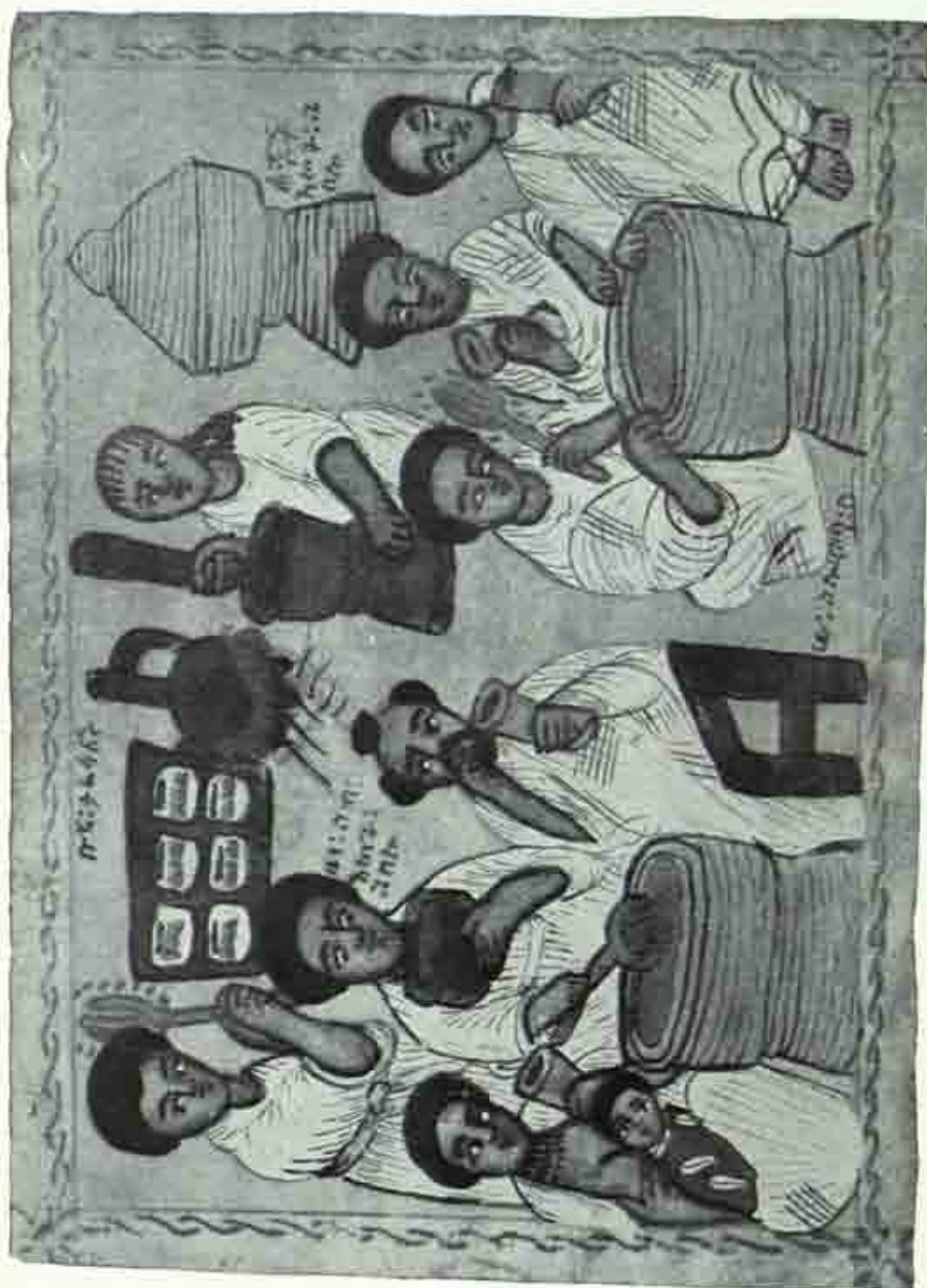
[87] The Apostles Matthew and Thaddaeus, from a fifteenth century manuscript. Each holds a handkerchief before his face as a token of respect, a gesture which is still performed by the chanters in the course of certain liturgical rites, as can be seen in the photograph on the opposite page. (Photo Bibliothèque Nationale)



[88] Nineteenth century silver seal belonging to an Ethiopian lady. (Photo J. Dorresse)

[89] Aksum: Palm Sunday. A long line of chanters, followed by the Cross-bearers in their velvet copes, advance, intoning, towards the Cathedral, slowly prostrating themselves at intervals, as if participating in a ballet. They wear a white toga or *shamma*, covering a tunic of striped silk. With the left hand, in which they also hold palm leaves, they cover their faces as a sign of grief or respect in accordance with the same gesture depicted on ancient manuscripts (as shown on the opposite page). (Photo J. Dorresse)





[30] A domestic scene, presided over by the mistress of the house and her servants. The household chores are often accompanied by improvised songs, mischievous or tender. Wicker baskets with a high conical foot serve as tables. Above, a mirror can be seen grinding coffee in a wooden mortar. (Popalay modern painting).



[91] Gondar: The Palace of Fasiladas. (Photo Tony Boyadjian, Addis Ababa)



[92] Addis Ababa: on St. Michael's Day a crowd of country people are moving about amongst the sunlit eucalyptus trees. Everyone has come to dance and sing or simply to look on. This peasant woman in her white cotton dress wears the *shamma* round her shoulders, a large white scarf with decorated border, part of which covers the head. Her hair is piled on top of her head and concealed under a muslin handkerchief. (Photo J. Doresse)

his empire to take in Dankali and Sennaar, and to check the advance of the Galla.

Perhaps to no small extent the positive achievements of this reign could be said to compensate for much that was lost in the course of a bitter religious conflict. The struggle against Islam had produced a state of poverty and inertia from which the advent of Susenyos finally roused the country, brutally perhaps but none the less effectively; and, once the wounds began to heal, that great awakening showed throughout the life of the community, in religion, art and literature, inspiring in subsequent generations the will to create a new Ethiopia.

VIII

THE GONDAR PERIOD

PERHAPS one should not delve too deeply into the period between Susenyos and the advent of Theodore II. During this time Ethiopia gradually lost her territorial unity, rival princes vied for supremacy, and the Galla tribes poured in over the frontiers. It was a dark chapter in the country's history and might all too easily have ended in complete disaster. But it is a period of decadence which is not without a certain charm of its own that is apparent in the palaces that have since fallen into decay. It tells a story of life at Court complete with hunting and ornamental gardens and every kind of pleasure in an entirely novel setting, of pious works extravagantly produced, of religion itself lost in the delights of subtlety. And besides, in spite of a general decline, a number of outstanding personalities emerged, shrewd politicians and military leaders, empresses and princesses possessed of beauty, wisdom, patience, and courage, by whose grace the milk of human kindness continued to flow despite the palace mutinies and assassinations. The picture is like a reflection of Florence as Machiavelli saw it. Bruce, who lived for two years in the midst of this prodigal scene, has left us a romantic description reminiscent of the last days of Byzantium.

Moreover, the period opens with three successive reigns of considerable splendour under Fasiladas, Yohannes, and Yasu the Great.

Fasiladas (1632-67), after his father's last battle and the abdication which followed, had the unhappy task of removing the Catholic clergy and restoring order. He carried it out pitilessly. In 1633 the Jesuits were obliged to leave their homes near the Court and go into exile at Aksum, some going on from there to India and some deciding to remain in Ethiopia. The latter were subsequently hunted out and put to death by execution, while Ras Se'ala Krestos, who proudly and stubbornly persisted in his adopted faith, was hanged. To prevent any further religious disturbance the king barred all Europeans from entering the country by any route, negotiating to this effect with the *Imams* of the Yemen and also with the *Pashas* of Sawakim and Massawa, who all undertook not to allow into their territory any member of the clergy who might be

on his way to Ethiopia. Fasiladas went even further in his treaty with the Yemen, stating that he was willing for Moslem missions to enter his kingdom. But the holy man who was sent forthwith was met with such hostility by the Christian population that such dangerous tactics died a natural death. Apart from these measures the reign of Fasiladas was distinguished by the creation of a new capital at Gondar, north of Lake Tana; an area considered to be at a safer distance from Galla invasions than Shoa, where the emperors had been living since the time of Sarsa-Dengel. Here Fasiladas built the grandest of all the palaces that were to be constructed in this region, along with a huge swimming pool close to the river Kaha, set in the midst of trees and shrubs, with a pavilion rising out of the water.

Yohannes, named 'The Just' (1667-82), made no attempt to pursue his father's foreign policy in relation to the Moslems, having become alarmed early on in his reign at the rapid expansion of Islam. He held a synod at Gondar which resulted among other things in drastic measures being taken against the Catholic descendants of the Portuguese. Those who were not prepared to renounce their faith were driven out towards the frontiers of Sennaar and left to wander in the desert. The Moslems were forbidden, as was already the case with the Armenians, Indians, and Persians, to settle in the new city, and they were obliged to quit the town vicinity to find somewhere more suitable.

Few additions were made by Yohannes to the buildings at Gondar, apart from two pavilions, one for the Chancellor and the other for the Library. He founded the Church of St. Anthony which contains some paintings of a distinctive charm, with bold lines and warm colours. He was a king who had a liking for monasteries and learning and above all theological disputation, which was encouraged far more during his reign than in his father's time. Such discussions frequently took place at Yebaba to the south of Tana, the more impassioned participants sometimes being sent off to a more or less uninhabited island to meditate on the holy scriptures. A passage which occurs in the biography of Yohannes tells how on one occasion he had to rise precipitately from his throne in order to separate two of the scholars who had become somewhat overwrought in an argument about the meaning of a verse in the gospel of St. Matthew. It was during the reign of Yohannes that an Armenian bishop brought from his native land a relic of Eustathius, the famous monk who founded the second of the great Ethiopian communities and who had gone off on one of his strange pilgrimages, to die

eventually in Armenia. The bishop was subjected to a prolonged interrogation of the utmost solemnity on the finer details of the Catechism to make sure he was not an impostor, before the bone he had brought was acclaimed as a holy relic. The reign of Yohannes is also noted for a series of campaigns, particularly against the Agaw who inhabited the lands to the south of Lake Tana and whose 'temples and idols' were destroyed, and also against the people of Lasta.

Yasu the Great (1682-1706) was the last great ruler of Ethiopia before the country fell into disorder and decay for something like a hundred and fifty years. His government was conducted on pious and orderly lines, a model of all that Ethiopian tradition stood for. Synods were a recurrent feature during this period, monks of different leanings discussing the nature of Christ with a vehemence which sometimes called forth a sharp rebuke from the King. Yasu was fond of the hermitages on the numerous islands of Lake Tana, visiting them frequently and even retiring at intervals for days or weeks at a time. He restored many churches. At Gondar he built the sanctuary of Debra-Berhan, 'Abbey of Light', the official record zealously listing every painting and precious object therein. According to popular belief he was the only person on the occasion of a visit to Aksum who was able to open the sacred Ark, which none of the priests could unlock with their keys.

He was also renowned for his administration. During his reign the *Fetha-Nagast*, which served as the civil code, was revised, and the laws of the land rectified. Correct behaviour was of the utmost importance to him; on one occasion, when the Court was assembling to go on a journey, he was shocked by the attire of some of the women of noble birth, who had donned short pantaloons and were mounting their mules like soldiers off to the wars. A royal decree went out that modesty in dress must be strictly observed.

Yasu led a number of expeditions against the Shankalla on the western frontiers and also against the Galla, particularly those of the Gibie area, who were pagans and had taken into slavery many thousands of Christians, offering them up at intervals as sacrifices to their gods in celebration of their victory. Yasu made mincemeat of this tribe and his men threw down before him the head of Dilamo their chief along with the bloody remnants of other victims. But there were many occasions, as when he went south to Shoa and visited the church of Tedbaba-Maryam, when his policy was simply to show his arm without actually using force if it could be avoided. His preference for diplomacy wherever possible is illustrated by the

story of how he succeeded in winning the allegiance of a chief who had been put in command by the Turks at Arkiko. This *naib* had tried to impose a tax on certain gifts which were being sent to the King. His supplies, which came from Ethiopia, were quite simply discontinued, which prompted him to seek an audience of the King forthwith in order to swear obedience.

The reign of Yasu was not only pious; it was magnificent. The King had a passion for hunting on a grand scale, and paid for his pleasure by a wound from a buffalo. At Gondar he built a second palace, not as large as that belonging to Fasiladas but more luxurious. The 'Chronicle' mentions gilded ceilings, ivory ornaments, and decorated wooden panelling . . . 'This house was more beautiful than the palace of Solomon'. A carrying-chair of cedar was also made for Yasu; it had posts of silver and a roof of gold, and a heap of purple cushions.

The prosperity which marks the reign of this king was doubtless due to the heavy caravan traffic between Ethiopia and the Eritrean ports and through Sennaar to Egypt. In 1693, on the initiative of the governor of the Dutch East Indies, Yasu received the gift of a bell for the church of Debra-Berhan. In 1698 he received the embassy of a French doctor called Poncet, who had been sent by Louis XIV.

Yasu was however obliged in the end to abdicate in the face of his own son's machinations, and he went into retreat on an island on Lake Tana, wearing a monk's habit and binding himself with chains. A few months later, when it was feared that he might return to the throne, assassins were sent in search of him. They entered his dwelling, where he was first shot and then killed by the sword. The news of his death spread fast and soon there came from all the island convents great numbers of priests and monks bearing crosses of gold, censers, and candles. A funeral chant was intoned over the corpse: 'How is it that thou, O King, hast died at the hands of contemptible slaves, thou who hast slain a multitude of foes . . .?' They placed the body on a reed-boat and towed it away, and the hippopotami lifted their heads out of the water in wonder at the cortège that passed. They buried him at the Church of Matraha 'where already the Emperor his father and the Queen his mother had their tombs'. Yasu the Great was regarded as a martyr and saint, as much for the brutal manner of his death as for his piety during life, and the Ethiopian Church commemorated him in prayers and hymns: 'Hail to thy sovereign, who donned the hood of a monk instead of a royal crown . . . Yasu, martyr whose blood was shed by injustice, thou to whom death came at a common soldier's hands!'

With the murder of Yasu the Great there began a time of upheaval from which only a few names have survived, such as the Emperors Bakaffa and Yasu II, the Empress Mentwab, and Ras Mikael. Then there is anarchy, during which there seems to have been a slight break in the legitimate succession, and a complete gap in the records. Later chronicles state that this period of confusion was due to the increasing influence of the Galla tribes in the capital, some pagan and some Moslem, who gradually assumed authority and were a continual source of disturbance in political affairs.

Takla-Haymanot, who had been responsible for the assassination of his father Yasu, was murdered in his turn in 1708. Theophilus, who was the brother of Yasu, was now put on the throne, and was thus able to avenge the royal murders; even Malako-Tawit, who had prompted Takla-Haymanot to put her own husband to death, was duly hanged. On the death of Theophilus in 1711 the throne was seized by Yostos, who was later poisoned by his enemies, his death no doubt being hastened by a fatal blow. It was now 1717. David III succeeded him, and had long enough to erect a 'Pavilion of Delight' as an addition to the palace buildings before he too fell a victim to poison. As it happened, none of these rulers was called upon to defend the Empire against a serious attack. The Galla were left to invade at will, while the capital, though it was raided periodically and sometimes violently, was largely preoccupied with theological controversy.

Bakaffa (1721-50), who next ascended the throne, has been compared by some with Louis XIV. He was highly-strung and a prey to superstition. Romantic stories had been circulated about him; it had been prophesied that during the reign of his heir one Walatta-Giyorgis, a woman, would exercise supreme power, and for the major part of his reign Bakaffa brooded uneasily upon the ways and means of dealing with this mysterious usurper-to-be. He therefore spent a good deal of his time in secret journeyings from one place to another, and in the course of his travels arrived at Quara, to the west of Lake Tana, where he developed a sudden illness. One of the local inhabitants gave him shelter, and he was nursed and eventually cured of his sickness by the daughter of the house, whose name was Berhan-Mogasa, 'Splendour of Light'; she was possessed of great beauty, with a sweet and generous disposition, and endowed with exceptional intelligence and wit, according to popular tradition. He married her and had a son, the future Yasu II, as a result of which his fears returned to afflict his mind with the dreaded

inescapable intervention of Walatta-Giyorgis whom he had never been able to find. Berhan-Mogasa was later crowned by Bakaffa with the name of Mentwab, meaning 'How beautiful thou art!' And gradually he wearied of the suspicions which filled him and drove him to persecute his subjects, and resigned himself to fate, proclaiming a time of peace which rejoiced the hearts of his people.

One day he happened to tell Mentwab the story of the prophecy, which he had never previously mentioned, and was relieved to learn from her that Walatta-Giyorgis was the first of her baptismal names. After this the prophecy brought him reassurance as an indication that on his death the Empress would become Regent during the period of her son's minority. When Bakaffa did eventually die, his wife very wisely concealed the fact for a time in order to establish her son's succession.

As a ruler Bakaffa was more effective than some of his predecessors. He resumed the building of the palace at Gondar, Mentwab also taking a hand in the planning of certain constructions. These were the last buildings to be put up before the final disintegration of the city. Military expeditions were dispatched to subdue revolts which had broken out in Damot, Begameder, and Lasta. But the King was unable to check the continued advance of the Galla, who were overrunning the eastern part of Shoa, cutting off the Sidamo, and annihilating the Christian communities in Enarya. It was during his reign that the province of Shoa became independent, proclaiming Abiya as king; and the prudent dynasty thus founded continued in power for more than a hundred years, expanding its territory while the rest of the empire fell into chaos.

On the accession of Yasu II, who was still a child, it was indeed Mentwab who controlled the State. Furthermore, she survived her son and retained her influence over a long period. Bruce has left us his impressions of the beautiful queen, who was already getting on in years when he saw her. She appears to have had Portuguese blood and possibly for that reason a leaning towards Catholicism, which would explain the story of the *Abuna* excommunicating the youthful Yasu II and his mother. No less attractive than the great Empress Helena, wife of Na'od, Mentwab remains one of the most remarkable figures in the history of Ethiopia, all the more so in view of the romantic circumstances which led her to become queen. The lords and chiefs of Quara, who were her kinsmen, and those of the military settlements of Gojjam were her trusted allies, and she was thus able to secure for Yasu II sufficient authority to put down the various risings and disturbances initiated by rival pretenders to

the throne, such as the revolt headed by a spurious Bakaffa during which the House of Gold and the Church of Raphael at Gondar were completely destroyed.

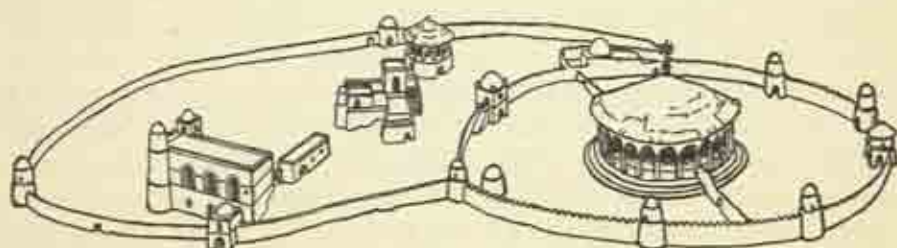
With his position thus safely established Yasu II was able to launch a number of successful campaigns, notably that which he directed against Ras Mikael-Sehul. This governor of Tigre had intrigued with the Turks of Arkiko to molest the Imperial Ambassador on his way to Cairo to bring back a new *Abuna*. Yasu forced him to surrender, which was a noteworthy achievement considering that the great Ras Mikael was so powerful that his prestige outshone all Yasu's successors. A further great campaign was directed against the Fung in the Sudan. This, although the official records refer to it as entirely successful, cost the king a distressing defeat in which the holy image of Christ Crowned with Thorns was captured by the enemy. At a later date, it had to be redeemed at some cost.

Yasu II would have liked to break away from the all-powerful guardians who were his mother's kinsmen and replace them as allies by the Galla, from amongst whom he selected a wife, named Wabi. He accomplished nothing by this except the loss of support of the Christians. Like his predecessors he had a liking for the chase, hunting elephants, buffaloes, and giraffes. He was a lover of luxury and elaborate architecture. A number of artisans from Smyrna who had fled from the misfortunes of their native land had taken refuge at Gondar, and the king made use of their skill in the work of decorating his sumptuous palace, whose throne room was hung with mirrors. According to Bruce the king was completely surrounded by silver and gold and brocade. At Azazo he built a handsome villa complete with fountains and groves of fruit trees. The capital was royally endowed with the church of St. John the Baptist. But perhaps his most distinctive achievement in this field was the small palace of the Empress Mentwab with its adjoining buildings, including an abbey, together constituting the last flowering of the characteristic art of Gondar.

Yasu II died young, his empire rent asunder by political conflict. His mother mourned him and ordered that he should be buried at Gondar beside his father Bakaffa. The funeral oration was read by Ras Wadaga over the double sepulchre: 'How is it that thou has vanished into the grave, alone, thou who hadst dominion over the whole of thy lands?' As in the case of Bakaffa, the new king was proclaimed before the death of his predecessor had been announced; it was his half-brother, Yoas, who was still a minor. 'He was led up to the top of the tower which is called Mannagesha; he was made to

sit upon a lofty throne of gold and was clothed in the royal robes', after which the crown was placed on his head and the proclamation made: 'Yasu, King of Kings, is dead! Yoas, King of Kings, liveth!'

In spite of Mentwab's influence—and she outlived a series of emperors—Gondar was never again the scene of architectural splendours; her greatness was ended forever. For more than a hundred years the ancient strength of the empire ebbed and failed in the turbulence of a deadly racial antagonism.



[8] Gondar: Monastery of Kusquam. The splendid round church of Debra-Tsahay on the right has a circular enclosure intercalated with towers which are the dwellings of the monks. In the left, the private residence set up by the Empress Mentwab has a circular chapel annexed to act as an oratory. The tall building in the foreground has retained the characteristic traits of the Portuguese colonial style, complete with turrets; it was used for official receptions. (After Monti della Corte, *I Castelli di Gondar*, 1938)

IX

PALACES—GARDENS—ABBEYS

WHEN the advance of the Moslems had brought them uncomfortably close to Tegulat the Ethiopian seat of government had had to shift its quarters, removing first of all to the south-west of Shoa to the area between Lake Zwai and the Gend Barat, where some emperors had in the past encamped with their armies, at Entotto, for instance, and Yerer. Later, Sarsa-Dengel had shifted again, this time to get away from the Galla tribes, gradually moving across to Lake Tana, where after trying the Danqaz district and Guba'e he finally settled on Guzara and built there a castle fortified with four round towers. Susenyos later built a royal residence at Guogora. Finally Fasiladas hit upon an ideal site to the north of the lake on the first slopes of the Waggara foothills, and here he built his palace. Around him settled all the nobles and Court officials, the military chiefs and church dignitaries, and the place became the city of Gondar, swarming in no time with inhabitants both Christian and Moslem. There were grammar schools, law schools, schools of theology and schools for the study of sacred music. Craftsmen of every kind came in large numbers to settle there. Caravans from the Sudan and the Red Sea brought prosperity to the city, which quickly became a thriving centre very different from some of the small country towns which had grown up here and there all over the country since the fall of Aksum. The undoubted attractions of the neighbourhood were no doubt due to its sunny climate, the nature of the countryside round about, which often had an abundance of vegetation and was certainly more fertile than Shoa with its chilly temperatures, and the proximity of a vast lake with some forty islands inhabited by monks, in some cases since the fourteenth century, where many former emperors had been laid to rest.

After the great military camps of former periods of stress, palace architecture marked a return to peace and security in everyday life. There was a revival of pomp and splendour in Ethiopia, whose apparent stability lulled her into a state of lethargy from which she awoke too late. It would have been advisable for the king and his army to have spent more time patrolling the different provinces, if

only to make their presence felt as the paramount authority in the kingdom. But nobody bothered. The kings of Gondar were intent upon recreation and pleasurable pastimes, music and lighthearted verse. The outlook of the time is revealed in all its simplicity in the story of Netcho, a noble who deprived the monks of Maguina of their abode, which happened to be situated in a particularly delightful spot, so well watered that it was always fresh and green: 'Netcho was a sensual man', says Bruce, 'who considered that Maguina, with all its groves and flowery pastures, was a more fitting environment for him who wished to taste the fruits of happiness with Wazera Esther, who was young and fair, than for a company of ascetics who were eternally at war with pleasure!'

Such a taste for indolence and luxury was undoubtedly the major influence in the lives of the kings who settled in this area, and it left its mark on the ecclesiastical architecture of the period as well as on the illuminated manuscripts.

In Gondar itself and in the vicinity there were thus some twenty palaces and other royal buildings and about thirty churches, all built by a series of emperors from Fasiladas to Yasu II. Those that survive are more or less ruined, but it is worth describing a few of the more interesting buildings, including some whose former splendour may be elicited from the records. The palace group is the most imposing, but in addition, not far from the city, there is the church of Debra-Berhan, which was founded by Yasu the Great, and the handsome abbey of Kusquam built by Mentwab; further off in the valley of the Kaha is the famous 'Pool of Fasiladas'.

The palace ruins still stand to a great height, but the tawny-coloured walls are thick with brambles. A huge encircling wall forms the enclosure, with conical towers at intervals whose entrance-ways bear evocative names such as Gate of the Judges, Gate of the Funeral Rites, Gate of the Spinners, Gate of the Musicians. Within this vast enclosure, over a thousand feet long, are about ten buildings of varying importance, the tallest of which present a certain incongruity, having towers in mediaeval style and lofty windows reminiscent of the Renaissance. It is difficult to say how far they show a connexion with the colonial architecture of the Portuguese, although this was certainly a source of inspiration. It has been suggested that these buildings were actually the work of the Portuguese, but this can hardly be so since at the time of the main foundations such Portuguese as had survived had already left the country. The buildings are arranged one after another from south to north, in strict order of succession according to the

chronological sequence of the kings who constructed them.

The first palace is the work of Fasiladas; it is bigger and loftier than the rest, almost square in plan, with a sugar-loaf tower at each of its four corners rising above the crenellated terrace, each one being crowned with a square, two-storeyed keep. There is a steep stairway on the outside of each tower leading up to the top, and a long covered way that connects with the Gate of the Judges in the enclosure wall. On the first floor the high windows form a complete semi-circle giving on to long wooden balconies. This was the most important of all the palaces and was frequently used by later kings for ceremonial occasions. It was here that Poncet had audience of Yasu the Great, whose magnificent surroundings made a great impression on him. Here too, in later times, during the reign of Takla-Haymanot II, a tragic scene took place, when the *'Akabe Sa'at*, a high palace official, was judged and condemned for treason.

The palace of Yasu the Great, which stands next to that of Fasiladas, is on a rather more modest scale. It has a quaint outside staircase curling up in a spiral from the bottom of one of the corner towers. Inside, on the second floor, there was a terraced roof supported by a series of round arches. The ground floor was used for receptions and the chronicler describes it as ornamented with ivory, with gilded ceilings and panelled walls decorated with paintings or hung with long mirrors. A large stone basin adorned the courtyard.

Farther on there are the remains of the library and chancellery put up by Yohannes, their walls slowly crumbling away. The interior had been given a bizarre effect by a series of imitation windows. Farther on still, to the north, the buildings dwindled in importance; there was a pavilion 'for Love', or, more correctly, 'for Nuptials', intended for use in preparation for royal weddings, and also the 'Pavilion of Delight', erected by David III. There is also the curious church of St. Michael, square in plan like some of the early Ethiopian churches, but with a different façade consisting of a series of wide bays with a round tower at either end, the whole having been skilfully added to the main body of the building. Close up against the enclosure wall is the long palace built by Bakaffa, with Mentwab's smaller one next to it, again with the characteristic outside staircase and the wooden balconies. When Bruce saw it the interior was still furnished; he noted great chests of cedar wood and, in between the window bays, brackets evidently intended for wall mirrors which had never arrived.

These buildings were comparatively soundly constructed, but they soon began to deteriorate. During the reign of Yasu II the

palace of Fasiladas had become damaged in the upper portion, and it may have been this that the king restored on such elegant lines, utilizing to advantage the skills of the craftsmen who had fled from Smyrna, many of whom were goldsmiths and silversmiths. The throne room had a wainscoting 4 feet in height, made not of wood but of ivory. Above this panelling, side by side, Venetian mirrors were suspended, set in a gilded moulding. The ceiling was made of reeds arranged in elaborate geometric patterns and painted in different colours. Another room, which was completely panelled in ivory, was decorated with stars of every conceivable hue. Was it this palace, or that of Yasu the Great, that was the scene of the assassination of Takla-Haymanot II, where in the tumult that followed, as recorded in the chronicles, the huge mirrors were smashed to pieces?

The palace buildings were undoubtedly surrounded by extensive gardens with running water and abundant orchards as at Azazo, where orange and lemon trees grew in profusion in the groves of Yasu II.

There are numerous churches still surviving at Gondar from this period, as well as a few paintings and some of the sacred books. The church of Antonius is one of the most pleasing; its charming paintings, which were rescued twenty years ago by the Mission Griaule, are now on view in Paris. The Church of St. John, which was built by Yasu, is square with a tower at each corner, like some of the palaces. But the two most important were Debra-Berhan and Debra Tsahai, or Kusquam. The Church of Debra-Berhan, which was built by Yasu the Great, has now lost much of its former splendour. According to the chronicles it was a magnificent building surrounded by trees of many different kinds. Contemporary writers rhapsodize about the cross with its golden balls which crowned the roof, and even more about the splendid paintings which completely covered the four walls of the holy of holies inside the church, depicting the Holy Trinity, the Creation, the Passion, the Life of the Virgin, the Patriarchs, the Judges and Kings of Israel, the Ecclesiastical Scholars, the Apostles, and the Archangels. The square tower had a pair of bells sent as a gift by the King of the Netherlands. There is a detailed list of the sacred objects and precious stuffs that also formed part of the endowment: crowns and crosses, a staff of silver with pommel of crystal, vestments of purple and gold, hangings and floor-coverings. . . .

The Abbey of Kusquam was finer still. It had a vast enclosure wall with squat turrets placed at intervals along it, and an inner

adjacent wall surrounding the buildings, which consisted of the Empress's private residence, a small chapel for her private devotions, and a State building with a round tower flanking it on each side, for official use. There were tall windows designed with a triple arch, with imitation pilasters on either side, and niches in between with a triangular pediment, features characteristic of Mentwab's architectural style. The great abbey church was circular, with a conical roof, raised on a round stepped platform; it contained paintings even more distinctive than those of Debra-Berhan, representing, in addition to the more usual scenes, the Last Judgement, the Revelation of the Coming of the Antichrist, and, so we are told, all the saints held in veneration by the Ethiopian Church. The sanctuary was solemnly consecrated by members of the clergy in many-coloured robes, and the chronicle enumerates in a list four pages long the vestments, vases, ornaments, parasols, manuscripts, and so on, donated by the Queen to the abbey. The lands belonging to Kusquam produced abundant vines and wheat, and nine buildings were erected—the towers on the enclosure wall—to serve as dwellings for the monks and store-houses for their produce.

What is there left of all this magnificent display? Only a few fine manuscripts preserved by the monks of Debra-Tsahai, and, half-hidden in an abandoned shrubbery, a row of tumbledown arches supported by a curving colonnade, of a simple elegance worthy of a Roman ruin.

The curious Pool of Fasiladas, constructed for that Emperor's pleasure and relaxation, is still in existence, though it has lost the carefully tended plantation which surrounded the large rectangular swimming bath. Near one end of the pool, with a little arched bridge to connect it with the bank, is a square pavilion with crenellations, reflected in the water. It is said that Yasu II drowned one of his friends there because he feared the man's ambition.

After a period of decadence as witnessed by Arnaud d'Abbadie, who saw the Emperor Sahla-Dengel on a ceremonial litter whose inlay was much worn, surrounded by servants in rags, Gondar was sacked and burned by Theodore II and twenty years later plundered by the Dervishes. Today the place is deserted and fallen into ruin, and a tangle of thick undergrowth has spread into the midst of the palaces and pavilions and abbeys. The carefully-tended flower beds have vanished, the rooms have lost all trace of their decorative panelling, the roofs and ceilings have fallen in, interiors everywhere are open to the sky. But, for the dreamer, this scene of desolation has a romantic fascination; the place seems haunted by ghosts and

memories, both fair and foul. Violence and corruption there may have been, and the dynasty was doomed; but there was also wisdom and faith and splendour, which the chroniclers hastened to record for the benefit of posterity. Yet there are those who see perhaps some kind of divine retribution in the blotting-out of this great capital, whose leaders repudiated an ascetism that had been traditional amongst their ancestors, to become the victims of their own profligacy.

X

THE AGE OF THE 'JUDGES'

FROM the time of Yasu II to that of Theodore there was a series of puppet-kings, who were entirely at the mercy of ambitious nobles who brought them to the throne or had them deposed. One is tempted to pass over this period of adversity as quickly as possible. But Ethiopia is the kind of country which in times of great stress regularly produces strong personalities of an original turn of mind who gradually bring about a redemption; and the following hundred years proved no exception.

On the death of Yasu, as we have seen, Yoas, who was still a child, was proclaimed king from the lofty tower of the palace, the scene of accession for many a future puppet. Yoas was the son of Wabi, the Galla wife of Yasu. The Wollo tribes were greatly encouraged by the presence of a king of their blood, and it became necessary to grant them more and more in the way of concessions, while the power of the Quara chiefs, Mentwab's kinsmen, diminished in the face of other tribes who were well on the way to achieving independence. Shoa, as already mentioned, had severed herself from the Empire. The Galla of the Wollo area sought to retain their independence. Lasta was defending her traditional autonomy under the descendants of the Zagwe dynasty. And in Tigre Ras Mikael had recovered his freedom and expanded his territory. He arranged for his son, and later for himself, marriage with the daughters of Mentwab. He went so far as to conquer Lasta, ostensibly on the King's behalf. At Gondar there was dissension between the Galla and the people of Quara. Mikael was called in to make peace, and promptly routed the kinsmen of Mentwab, following this up with an attack on the Galla. At this point an event of some moment took place. Mikael, as he was sitting on the balcony of his house at Gondar, narrowly escaped being killed by a musket-ball fired by one of the royal servants. That night, by revenge, Yoas was strangled in his palace.

Ras Mikael then sent for the younger brother of Yasu II to be brought from the Wahni, the prison that housed the rival claimants

to the throne. This brother, who was then 70 years of age, died only a few months after being enthroned. He was replaced by his son, Takla-Haymanot II, who agreed to enter wholeheartedly into the plans of Ras Mikael. Here the chronicles become somewhat confused, and it is to Bruce, who was staying at Gondar during this period, that we owe a clear picture of certain events. Authority passed into the hands of the military chiefs, and from now on we find with increasing frequency not a single ruler but two royal opponents, the power swaying between the two as victory alternates with defeat on either side. Yet the period was not without its noble and outstanding personalities, such as Ras Mikael Schul, whose authority was so remarkable that the chronicler seems to forget sometimes that over him there was in fact a monarch. He has been called the Ethiopian Warwick, but these great political figures of Ethiopia have closer parallels in the Bible. Ras Mikael seems in fact to have been surrounded with a kind of halo. His wisdom has been universally praised, but even more remarkable was the way in which he always had recourse to prophecies when he wished to make a decision. He was by no means the only great figure of the time in Gondar; Mentwab still retained considerable influence, and Bruce remarks on the many attractive personalities that surrounded her at this time, such as Wazera Esther, who 'beneath that delicate beauty possessed the courage of a Roman woman. . . .' The Scot recorded also a striking portrait of the Emperor Takla-Haymanot, who was energetic and courageous, as well as remarkably patient; only towards the end of his career did this prince allow himself to be influenced by the violence that went on around him, when he took vengeance on his enemies with unmitigated savagery.

The most eventful period of his reign, though it lasted for only a short time, was when Ras Mikael after fluctuating between success and defeat was taken prisoner by a coalition of the chiefs of Begameder and Gojjam with the Galla, and was prevented from returning to his native province of Tigre.

For the murder of the Emperor Yoas had not been forgotten. Mentwab, who had by now retired from public life, found herself becoming surrounded by various malcontents who rose so swiftly to power that Ras Mikael and Takla-Haymanot were obliged to abandon Gondar in some haste. But Susenyos, a bastard prince whom the rebels had put up in opposition to the Emperor, was soon defeated. The King and Ras Mikael re-entered their capital with all the forces at their command and took a terrible vengeance. A band of strolling players, who came to meet them singing their

praises, had unfortunately sung a very different tune at the time of the interregnum, in the hopes of pleasing the usurper. At a sign from the King their latest eulogies died on their lips, and the roistering band was massacred on the spot. The rebels who had remained in Gondar were then executed one and all; there was no weakening, and no mercy. One of the palace dignitaries, the 'Akabe Sa'at, had ventured to excommunicate the Emperor; his judgement took place in the Stateroom of the palace, Bruce being a witness to the scene. Amongst the accusations that were heaped on his head were crimes he was alleged to have committed in relation to women, which caused the 'Akabe Sa'at to laugh, saying that such things 'were indeed crimes amongst other Christian communities, but not amongst the Christians of his own native land, who lived simultaneously under the law of Moses and the law of Christ . . . From time immemorial the Patriarchs of Israel had behaved as he had and had not been less cherished by God!' He was hanged there and then in his ecclesiastical robes. Those of lesser rank who were found guilty were left for the hyenas to devour, their mutilated bodies strewn about the squares and streets of Gondar, no one daring to bury them.

Yet the opposing army was already returning to the attack. Ras Mikael and Takla-Haymanot waited for them at Serbakussa, a place chosen by Ras Mikael almost certainly on account of the ancient prophecy of the *Fekare-Iyasu*, which stated that a Ras of Begameder would one day defeat and kill a king at this spot, after which a ruler named Theodore would arise and carry his empire as far as Jerusalem . . . However, possibly because this apocalyptic hour had not yet arrived, Ras Mikael was vanquished after three battles. Mentwab sought refuge in Gojjam, while Takla-Haymanot II was for the time being left undisturbed upon the throne. Then, on a day in 1779, the Galla forces of Ras Gusho, who had defeated Ras Mikael, invaded the palace and massacred the king, shattering the great Venetian mirrors in the course of the struggle.

Takla-Giyorgis his brother succeeded him and reigned off and on until 1800. During his reign the clashes between the various chiefs became so violent that he was obliged to seek refuge with the hermits of the Woldebba region, where peaceful conditions as yet prevailed. But he entered into an alliance with a Galla chief named 'Ali, making him governor of Begameder. 'Ali took the lead from the rival chiefs and obtained from the king the title of *Betwadam*, or Chief Vizier, which he bequeathed together with the province of Begameder to his successors. He thus created a kind of Galla dynasty

which endured for nearly a century, stripping the imperial power of Gondar of all but a purely nominal authority. This period, which lasted from 1781 until 1855, has been called the age of the *Masafent* or Judges. After Ras 'Ali came 'Aligaz and Gugsä, and in 1825 Ras Imam, a supporter of Islam, which continued thereafter to progress. In 1828 Ras Imam was succeeded by Mare'ed, who allied with the powerful governor of Semen against Sab'a Gadis of Tigre. Mare'ed was slain in battle, but Ubye of Semen, his victorious ally, avenged his death by the capture of Sab'a Gadis who was executed. Ubye was thus able to unite Tigre with his previous dominions, and transferred his capital to Adowa, while Ras Dori was put in control of Begameder by the Galla, to be succeeded almost at once by Ras 'Ali II. The latter, who was young and capricious, appears to have had no use for the Christian faith professed by his predecessors, corruption amongst the clergy having brought about a general decadence. In the words of the chronicler: 'The clergy were reduced to a state of ignorance. The priests were wholly taken up with earthly pursuits. Debauchery, witchcraft, and drunken orgies were their chief preoccupation . . .' Accordingly Ras 'Ali II instituted a pilgrimage to the tomb of Gran the *Imam*! This, however, cost him the support of the Ethiopians, who were, as it happened, deeply attached to their religion. He thus soon found himself in a rather difficult position, which was hardly eased by continual skirmishing with Gojjam, where the family of Ras Haile were well-established, and Tigre, which was still in the hands of the redoubtable Ubye. The guardianship of his mother Manan irked him and he attempted to break away by arranging that she should marry the king, Yohannes III. But the new queen, who received an ironic welcome from the inhabitants of Gondar, avenged her various wrongs by imposing a harsh government which only succeeded in lowering the morale of the city still further.

Ethiopia was now beginning to break up into a series of states which were largely independent: Begameder, Gojjam, Tigre, Lasta, the Eastern Galla province, and Shoa . . . It so happened that the latter, which was cut off from the rest by groups of Wollo Galla, had been able to make considerable progress. The frontiers had been expanded under the leadership of a series of kings who, in the course of their lengthy and undisturbed reigns, were gradually able to free themselves from the Galla who had infiltrated into their domain. These kings were, respectively, Abiya (1718-45); Amha-Yasu (1745-74), whom Bruce met at Gondar; Asfa-Wasen; and Sahela-Selassie (1815-47), who at Angolala and Ankober was visited

by Rochet d'Héricourt, who had been sent by Louis-Philippe, and by Major W. C. Harris on behalf of the British Government. These kings were friendly and perfectly prepared to enter into relations with European powers.

Out of the midst of war and everlasting strife which ravaged the greater part of the country there slowly emerged the figure of a man destined to restore the kingdom to unity. Kasa was born in Quara somewhere between 1818 and 1821. He was to have become a monk, and his mother placed him in a monastery near Lake Tana, a fact which may explain his leanings towards mysticism. In the cause of a local skirmish the convent was destroyed, and Kasa, who had managed to escape from the massacre, took refuge with his uncle Kanfu, Keeper of the King's Door. It was here perhaps that Arnaud d'Abbadie met him and, struck by his personality, was afterwards moved to write the following prophecy: 'Kasa, who is now unknown to the world, will one day become Ras over the whole of Abyssinia'.

At this time the ambitions of Mohammed 'Ali had led to the expansion of Egypt into the Sudan. Kasa became the leader of a band which made a successful attack on the Takruri and the Shan-kalla at Matamma on the west bank of the Nile. He won such renown from this exploit that thousands flocked to join him. The Empress Manan, who feared for her son Ras 'Ali, sent an expeditionary force to attack him, but in vain; her defeat obliged the queen to surrender Dambeya to Kasa and to give him the daughter of Ras 'Ali, whose name was Tawabatch, in marriage. There was an assault by the Egyptians from the Gallabat area in 1838 and several churches were desecrated. The inhabitants of Gondar became seriously alarmed. Ras Ubye and Kanfu took reprisals, Kasa joining with them out of righteous indignation; he tried to drive the Egyptians out of Matamma, but was defeated. Kanfu had slightly more success, and Ubye succeeded in getting France and Great Britain to intervene in order to compel Mohammed 'Ali to renounce his whole campaign against Ethiopia.

Kasa's temporary downfall had brought forth a volley of jeers and insults from the queen, and his wife incited him to take revenge. He imprisoned the Empress, compelling 'Ali at the same time to acknowledge his suzerainty over the dominions belonging to his uncle Kanfu. He then established himself at Gondar, and made a somewhat daring move by summoning Ras Goshu of Gojjam to pay homage. The latter indignantly set forth to attack him, but was defeated and killed near Guogora in November, 1852. 'Ali too was

routed and fled to Wollo. By 1840 Ethiopia had already been re-organized into four states; now, apart from Kasa, there were only two, namely Shoa, under Haile-Malakot, and Tigre, under Ubye. The latter was taken captive in 1855 near Darasge; in the east, the Wollo Galla were subdued; and in October of the same year Shoa was conquered. Kasa had succeeded in bringing about the unity of Ethiopia after a break of over a hundred years. Inspired by the ancient prophecy which had never been forgotten and which, as we have seen, had already influenced Ras Mikael, Kasa had himself proclaimed Emperor on 5 May, 1855, under the name of Theodore. He did not belong to the Solomonite line of kings, but with his reign the great royal chronicles were resumed as a tangible sign to one and all of the imperial sovereignty.

XI

THEODORE

UPON his accession, Theodore II (1855-68) proclaimed himself as the Emperor named in the prophesies, who would arise to deliver the kingdom and unify her dominions. There are few reigns more open to misinterpretation than that of Theodore, since judgement is liable to be led astray by the acts of atrocity which were a feature of this period. Ethiopian historians, on the other hand, with a deeper awareness of its intrinsic significance, would appear to have extolled the work of unification that paved the way to a resurrection of the Empire; only by paying the price could a nation whose religious faith and political sovereignty had come to the brink of collapse aspire to deliverance from her misfortunes.

Indeed the new Emperor achieved much that was constructive: there were judicial and administrative reforms, and a ceaseless and highly effective campaign was carried on against the over-ambitious nobles, invaders such as the Wollo Galla and the Yeju, and the ever-encroaching Moslems who were either converted or driven out. In order to make a complete break with the dissolute Court at Gondar, Theodore transferred his residence to Makdala, thereby returning the seat of government to the province of Amhara for the first time since the Middle Ages. The palaces of Gondar were in any case falling into ruin, except for that built by Fasiladas. In 1866, therefore, the emperor decided to strip the former capital of all its remaining wealth, removing the treasure from forty-four churches and in addition some 900 precious manuscripts, which were taken to Makdala. The city of Fasiladas and Bakaffa was then left to burn. Apart from Makdala, Theodore also had Debra-Tabor in mind for future development, and here the ground was later levelled 'like the cover of a book' in order to construct new churches. Also, acting on advice he had had from a number of foreigners, he attempted to manufacture what he had hitherto been obliged to obtain at great pains from Europe, namely an enormous cannon which his workmen refused to have dealings with; 'The great sound of its voice would cause every woman with child to miscarry; the people would sicken in agony and die!' was their excuse. During the last days of

Makdala an attempt was made to operate this specimen; the whole thing exploded as soon as it was fired.

But the reign was darkened from the outset by the extraordinary violence of the Emperor. The persecution of certain Catholic clergy and even that of Abba Salama, the *Abuna*, who was said to be corrupt, were nothing to the flood of murders which ensued. A single word, wrongly construed, could lead to the death of its author, and every wise man knew it. When Theodore invited Blata Bakatu, who had a reputation for telling jokes, to entertain him with an anecdote, the latter replied 'Sire, I used to know some good stories in the days when wit was fashionable; at the moment I confess I cannot remember any of them'. Quarrels with priests and clerics went on incessantly. Even the peasants were persecuted, whole villages being burnt down after the inhabitants had shut themselves up in their houses. Yet Theodore in a sudden fit of good humour might exclaim: 'Good sir, pray put me to death and give your wretches a moment's respite!' But fear overshadowed the land in such degree that a kind of mass terror was apt to break out, conjuring up visions of sorcerers transformed into hyenas, leopards, or mice by a trick of the devil.

Extravagant visions of brilliant conquests, coupled with inhuman atrocities, led eventually to the downfall of the king. His campaigns against the Turks had already alarmed the Khedive, and in the hope of restraining the Emperor he attempted to negotiate with him through the Patriarch of Cairo, which caused a great scandal amongst the Ethiopians. Theodore, intent upon his own plans, thought that Britain as a Christian power would come to his aid against the Moslems. In 1862 he accordingly wrote a letter to Queen Victoria proposing a thoroughgoing alliance. The Foreign Office, however, had just concluded a treaty with Turkey against Russia! The silence which greeted his message maddened the emperor and deeply offended him, with the result that he considered himself at liberty to imprison the British Consul along with a number of other Europeans. When it became clear that they would not be released through diplomatic channels, a military expedition set sail from Great Britain under Sir Robert—later Lord—Napier, who landed in Ethiopia in December 1867 and after minute preparations set off for Amhara. On 15 April, 1868 Theodore shot himself at Makdala, which had been captured. The popular songs of the day immortalized him:

From the heart of Makdala comes a lament:
For he is dead, whom woman never bore!

In the heart of Makdala, hast thou seen the lion die?
Death were dishonour, at the hand of man.

And yet, the overriding desire of Theodore had been to achieve the greatness of his Empire and its unity. Unity he had indeed accomplished, and it fell to his successors to restore once more the greatness of the Ethiopian realm.

There was a lighter side to Theodore's reign, which had its romantic episodes; nor was the king entirely devoid of finer feelings, as is shown by the lines he composed on the death of his wife Tawabatch: 'She who understood the mysteries of many things died yesterday . . .' There is also the account by Arnaud d'Abbadie of the circumstances of the king's meeting with another woman who became his wife, the daughter of Ras Ubye. She had been given into the care of the monks at Darasge, who one day, thinking a band of marauders was on its way to the monastery, hurriedly concealed their treasures and hid the princess in a disused tomb. In fact, it was the Emperor who arrived, and noticing with some surprise the discomfiture of the brethren he ordered everything to be opened up, including the sepulchre. 'Great was his amazement when he discovered therein, instead of a coffin, a young and beautiful damsel who was bathed in tears and kneeling in the attitude of prayer. Theodore immediately forgot his earlier loves to whom hitherto he had remained faithful. He set Ubye free and asked for his daughter in marriage, and it was not long before she became the Queen of Ethiopia. . . .'

XII

CONTEMPORARY ETHIOPIA

WE are still too close to the events and personalities of the most recent chapter in the history of Ethiopia to be able to look at them in perspective. Facts may be recorded and filed away in the name of History, but there are still many wounds unhealed, even by the passage of time, passions that still smoulder and enduring memories.

The death of Theodore was followed by four years of bickering before Yohannes IV (1872-89) was eventually crowned at Aksum. Shoa did not come under his jurisdiction; Menelik, the able son of the ruler Haile-Malakot, having managed to escape from Makdala in 1865, had since taken over his father's throne. Yohannes, however, had more important political anxieties which were of an unprecedented kind, for the empire, suddenly snatched out of a state of isolation, found itself surrounded by European powers exhibiting great interest in the Red Sea coastal region and the lands of the Upper Nile, the Suez Canal having been just opened in 1869. Egypt, the Khedive Ismael having recaptured the Turkish ports of Suakin and Massawa in 1865, at first attempted a policy of expansion. General Münzinger extended the Khedive's control to Keren, while Raw'uf Pasha from 1870 onwards occupied the Somali coast from Zaila to Cape Guardafui, following this up with an invasion of Harar in 1875, where the Egyptians were forcibly converting the Galla to Islam. One or two Egyptian attacks vainly attempted to make inroads on Ethiopian territory; in 1875 Münzinger's army was wiped out in Awssa, and that of Arakel Bey was hacked to pieces by Yohannes on the Mareb river. In the following year an attempt on the part of the Khedive to win back prestige sadly eclipsed by these inglorious episodes was to suffer a similar fate.

The Egyptians did not pursue their aggressive policy. In 1885 the rising of the Mahdi in the Sudan sent hordes of fanatical troops across the frontiers from Dongola. In 1884 Yohannes made the most of this situation, obtaining from the British in return for his support the city of Keren and the use of Massawa as a port. In 1887, a Dervish host smashed their way through the troops of the Negus of Gojjam and poured into Gondar, sacking and burning the city and

massacring its inhabitants. Yohannes retaliated a year later by slaughtering 60,000 followers of the Mahdi at Matamma; but he was wounded and died almost immediately.

In the course of his reign he had indicated his hatred of Catholics, Moslems and pagans by making conversion of the infidels a compulsory measure in 1878. Religious liberty was not restored until after his death. He removed the seat of government for a time to Makalle on the Tigre plateau, where he built a palace as original as those of Gondar but rather more up-to-date in style.

After him the throne went to Menelik II (1889-1913), a realistic and highly effective politician who within some twenty years succeeded in transforming and enlarging Ethiopia in a most remarkable way, pushing forward his frontiers to Gedaref, Khar-toum, and Lake Victoria. Menelik's first problem was the Italian infiltration which was taking place in the north. The Italians had bought the port of Asab in 1882 from a private trading company and formed a colony there. In 1885, a year of some consequence, the Italians landed at Massawa, the British took Zaila and Berbera, and the French, who had been at Obok since 1881, occupied Djibuti. Yohannes had been anxious to secure Massawa and Keren and in 1887 had therefore taken action against the Italians, defeating them at Dogali. But later he had had to surrender. Menelik came to an initial agreement recognizing Italian sovereignty north of the Mareb and linking his foreign policy with that of Italy in the Treaty of Uccialli drawn up in May, 1889 in the plain north of Lake Haik. Four years later the treaty was renounced by Menelik. The Ethiopians, and in particular Ras Mangashe of Tigre, looked with increasing misgiving upon the advance of their temporary allies who by 1894 had reached Agordat and Kasala and the following year, in response to the first Tigrean protests under arms, arrived in the region of Adowa and Enda-Mohoni. In September of that year a mass conscription was ordered by Menelik and he set out for the north. On 7 December the Italians were driven off the Amba-Alagi and later out of Makalle. On the first of March 1896 the Imperial Army of 70,000 men was attacked in the Adowa mountains by Italian forces under General Baratieri; his troops were cut to pieces. That autumn a treaty was signed to check any further expansion on the frontier. That Italy could be thus put down was a timely demonstration of Ethiopia's right to figure as a great and independent nation on the map of the world. Moreover Menelik's conquests had virtually doubled the territorial area of the kingdom; as King of Shoa and later as Emperor he had restored the lands that

had been lost since the great Moslem invasion and added many more. His early expeditions had made vassal states of Kaffa and Jimma (1881); Arussi and Wollega were conquered in 1886; Harar, after the victory of Tchalanko, and Ilubabor were annexed (1887); Ogaden, Bale, Sidamo and Kambata were taken (1890-3); the Wollamo, Borana, and Beni-Shangul tribes were subdued, and Kaffa, where a revolt broke out, was finally defeated after a campaign lasting nine months (1897-8); lastly, Ras Makonnen, who had been made governor of Harar, pacified the lands between Wabi and Lake Awssa. Menelik's expansion might have gone even further, since in June 1898 envoys from Ethiopia and France in common accord hoisted their flags at Fashoda, one on either bank of the Nile.

The Empire was now becoming modernized as a result of the help of European technicians under the vigilant direction of the able and practical-minded Menelik. Before he came to the throne the Emperor had chosen the draughty uplands of Entotto for his residence, building the Church of Maryam there and also that of Ragwal, both fine examples. In 1893 he founded Addis-Ababa as his capital city, lower down in the more sheltered plain. Addis-Ababa, 'New Flower', was a wise choice for the modern governmental centre, set amid an extensive sunlit plateau which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had been the home of former kings. The move found favour among the religious literature, a Homily being composed on the Archangel Ragwal—*Dersana Ragwal*—which eloquently sang the praises of the monasteries round about, their great age and venerability—as at Zukwala and Yarar—as compared with the rest of the province and the north of Ethiopia. A new tree brought in by the Frenchman Mondon-Vidailhet, the eucalyptus, was used to give shade to new dwellings built in the city, and spread from there throughout the kingdom, modifying the traditional aspect of the countryside not a little. The construction of the railway to link Addis-Ababa with Djibuti was undertaken by a French firm and eventually led to the founding of Dire-Dawa.

When Ras Makonnen died in 1907, Menelik wept for three days for his greatest and ablest official, who for many years had been his right-hand man. He himself was getting old and soon after became unable to carry on. In 1909 he nominated as his successor his grandson Lej-Yasu, who was still a child. Lej-Yasu was the son of the great Ras—then Negus—Mikael of Worra Himano. Until 1911 Ras Tasama acted as regent and later Ras Mikael took over the principal role until the death of Menelik in 1913.

Lej-Yasu was detested from the moment he was made Emperor, on account of his incompetence and his Moslem leanings. The chiefs of Shoa were eventually obliged to have him deposed by the *Abuna*, who nominated the daughter of Menelik, Zawditu, as Empress. Ras Tafari, son of the great Ras Makonnen, was made Regent and recognized as heir to the throne. Ras-Mikael tried in vain to avert the downfall of his son by force of arms, and was defeated near Debra-Berhan; Lej-Yasu fled.

Ras Tafari has carried on the work that was begun by Menelik, both in domestic reforms and in foreign policy, in order to achieve for Ethiopia a strong independent status equivalent to that of the European countries. In 1923, as a result of his efforts, Ethiopia became a member of the League of Nations. In 1926 he included under his personal administration, as with Harar, the province of Wollo, and reorganized the army. In 1928 he received the title of *Negus*. In the following year he put down two rebellions, that of the Galla Yeju and that of Ras Gugsu. Zawditu died in March, 1930, and on 20 November in that year the king ascended the throne, taking the Imperial title Haile Selassie I.

The anguish and disaster that overtook him in 1935, when the Italians occupied the country, is well known. Ethiopia was sacrificed for the sake of European peace. After a bitter ordeal during which the country carried on a determined resistance, liberation came in 1941. The king made a triumphal re-entry into his capital and resumed the work of modernization throughout the Ethiopian Empire in the advancement of techniques and intellectual achievement. In the recent history of Ethiopia two events may be recalled as of outstanding significance: first, in July, 1948, an agreement with the Coptic Patriarchy which brought to an end the ancient statute whereby the Ethiopian Church was under the jurisdiction of an Egyptian *Abuna*, the Head of the Church being henceforth an Ethiopian, albeit sanctioned by the Patriarchy, and having the power to ordain his own bishops. Second, in 1952, Eritrea was made a federal state under the Empire, whereby the latter recovered her former maritime frontiers and ports of old, where 2,500 years before her early immigrants had landed, bringing with them the arts of civilization and a traditional way of life.

With the celebration of the Jubilee of the Coronation of His Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, on 2 November, 1955, Ethiopia commemorated not only twenty-five years of one of the greatest reigns in her history, but also twenty-five centuries of civilization and independence.

XIII

CHURCHES—MONASTERIES—MANUSCRIPTS

THE last few chapters have been concerned primarily with the varying fortunes of this great empire as expressed in terms of historical events, neglecting—inevitably—much that has also been of consequence in the course of many centuries. Before leaving this survey of Ethiopia and her past we ought perhaps, as in the case of the Aksumite period, to consider briefly the religious activities, the monasteries, and the art which, from the thirteenth century onwards, inspired and enhanced the empire with a new vitality. The Portuguese in the sixteenth century were amazed at the pageantry they encountered and said so in their various writings; in Cairo, gifts sent by the Emperor often caused quite a stir amongst the inhabitants. But the most remarkable evidence of distinctive attainment lies in the manuscripts, a revealing feature of any civilization; their numbers are impressive, their illuminations and their neat, meticulous calligraphy far superior to the many mediaeval specimens which are extolled because their cultural source happens to be better known, but which are clumsily executed and often inaccurate.

Religion lies at the core of Ethiopian civilization, which stems from Old Testament tradition no less than from the teachings of Christ. Again and again the Ethiopians have seemed to turn aside from the temptations of worldly wealth or to devote their riches outright to the glory of God. For this reason, with few exceptions, they have left behind them churches and convents rather than palaces.

The most important of all these sanctuaries is the Cathedral at Aksum, dedicated to Our Lady of Zion, where according to tradition the Tablet of Moses was deposited. Before the porch leading to the inner enclosure is the Throne of the Imperial Coronation, with other votive thrones close by. Inside the sacred enclosure stands the cathedral, with a number of outbuildings, a chapel, and a small cemetery. No one may enter this enclosure without first removing his shoes, and women are never allowed therein. The cathedral stands in the middle, and was probably built on the site of the

holiest of all the ancient temples; it is raised up on a great platform with a vast expanse of steps leading to the church, flanked on either side by a row of bell-turrets, which are a late addition. The church itself, as it stands today, is a rectangular construction with battlements and a small bell-tower. The façade has three large openings or bays which were once rectangular in shape but were transformed some decades ago into tall rounded arches.

Through a side door is a large vestibule, which has three broad naves supported by piers of masonry, massive and square-cut. In one corner there is a pile of big hemispherical drums used in religious ceremonies. The walls of the sanctuary are covered with paintings, which also adorn the two side chapels, whose doors remain closed to the laity. The paintings have been restored by a modern Aksumite artist, Aleqa Yohannes, who has faithfully reproduced the traditional style. Below a representation of the Virgin holding the Infant Jesus we see the chief monks and miracle-workers of Ethiopia. On the other side, below St. George, who is on horseback and in the act of slaying the dragon, the Nine Saints are depicted arriving in front of the cathedral, while a representation of the Holy Trinity stands out from the midst of a large-scale composition over the door of the sanctuary.

This church has suffered destruction so many times in the course of the centuries that nothing remains of the earlier constructions apart from the foundations and a number of stone blocks carved in the archaic style which have been re-used here and there in the existing walls. From descriptions which have survived the church appears to have been rather larger up to the sixteenth century, constructed in the form of a great basilica with five vaulted naves. When Gran invaded the neighbourhood the king took steps to remove and conceal the altar or *tabot*, which according to the Moslem chronicle consisted of 'white stone inlaid with gold, so large that it would not go through the door'. The cathedral was then demolished by the invaders, and it was Sarsa-Dengel who rebuilt it in 1854. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it was again burned down and destroyed, afterwards being reconstructed on its present plan.

Outside the cathedral, away to the left, is the separate chapel sacred to the Tablet of Moses said to have been brought by Menelik I and his companions from Jerusalem. The façade has recently been adorned with scenes and portraits arranged in registers right up to the roof, depicting, along with this story, the origins of the Imperial Family. When the door is unlocked by the priest attached

to this hallowed shrine, a narrow vestibule is revealed, the entire wall space being covered with paintings of sacred scenes in minute detail, with figures of angels and archangels, the central figures being a representation of the Trinity. What lies behind, in the holy of holies, nobody knows.

The other pavilions contain valuable manuscripts, crosses and ikons of solid gold, sacred vestments embroidered with gold, and in particular the interesting set of crowns, tiaras and diadems, all of which at one time or another have been consecrated for the cathedral by various emperors on their accession or on the occasion of a victory such as that of Menelik II at Adowa.

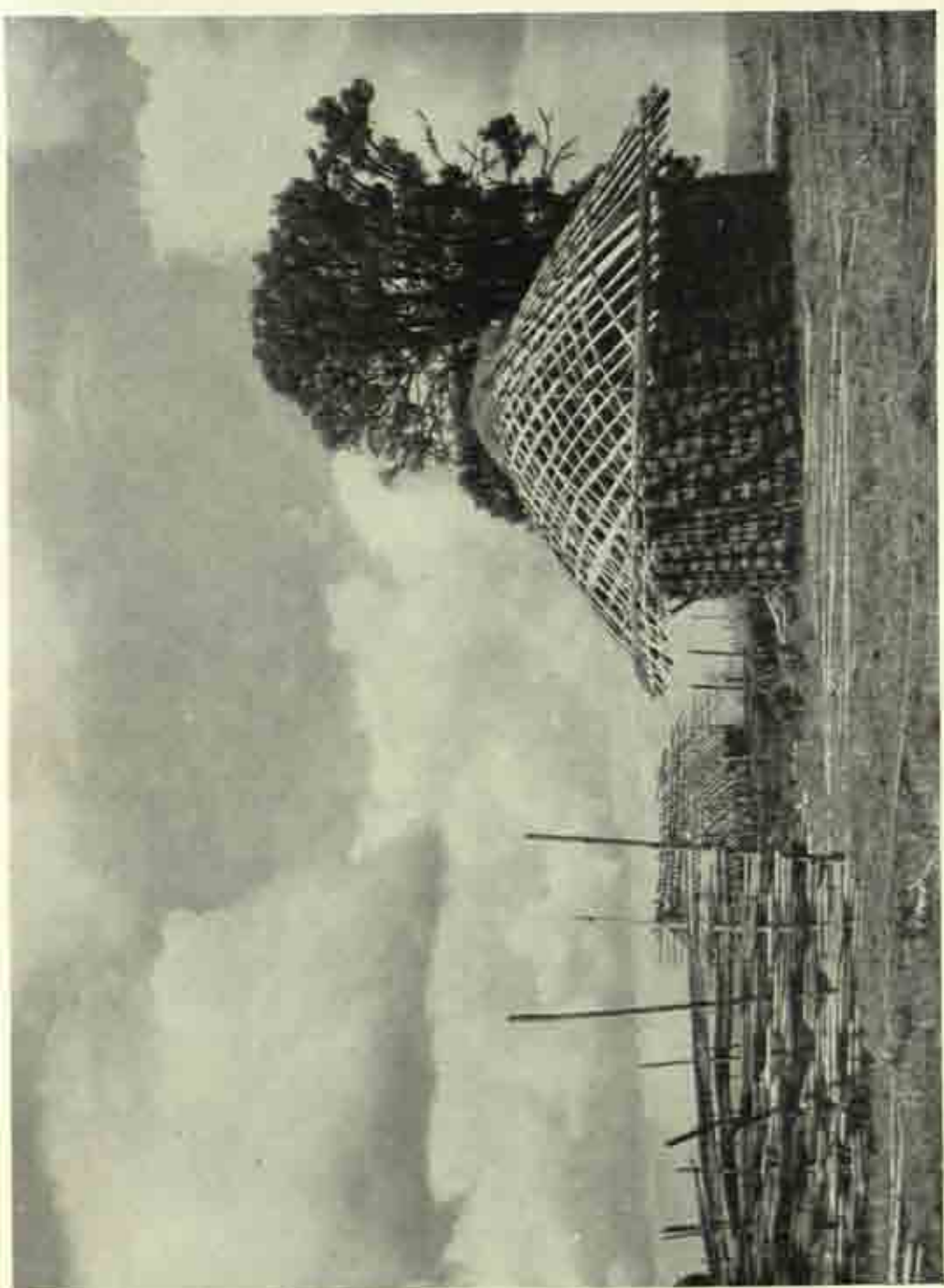
These precious objects give at least some indication of the kinds of treasure which must have been stored in the countless churches destroyed in the sixteenth century, for details of which we have to rely on the impressions of Moslem chroniclers or, more particularly, on the descriptions given by Alvarez. The latter records a visit to the church of Ganata-Giyorgis, with its panelled walls and paintings covering the entire interior, executed by the Venetian artist Brancalone. The doors, which he inspected at close quarters, were not just gilded; they were skilfully overlaid with gold leaf. This sanctuary was supported by thirty-six tall wooden pillars, also painted elaborately. Later he and his companions escorted Lebna-Dengel, the Emperor, to the even more remarkable church of Makana-Selassie. Here the Portuguese were stunned by the welcome extended to the king by a huge procession of 20,000 clergy and monks in orderly ranks on either side of a host of golden crosses borne aloft, their 'mitred' dignitaries in front, with bearers of ceremonial umbrellas bigger than any that had ever been seen in Portugal. The church itself, which was large enough to hold 2,000 quite easily, was constructed in white stone, a lofty building with three naves, walls covered with paintings, and six supporting pillars of stone. This may in fact have been an early example of the circular type of church with concentric galleries or 'naves', for there is some mention of a 'circuit' of sixty-one tall wooden pillars supporting the timbers, with a central shrine at a higher level, draped with brocade and fabric woven with gold and tapestries of the western variety.

There seems no doubt that not only Coptic and Syrian craftsmen but also Europeans filtered into Ethiopia at different times and made their distinctive contribution to the development of local art. There were Florentines who arrived in 1402, and the Venetian Brancalone fifty years later, who introduced a number of sacred figures characteristic of Graeco-Italian iconography. But they were

all more or less completely assimilated and very soon forgotten, for by the end of the sixteenth century Ethiopia was vigorously defending her national art with its 'Egyptian' motifs against the religious images introduced by the Jesuits, which appeared quite alien and even heretical. A better balance was achieved in due course, and a type of art began to appear which is more familiar to us through such examples as the fine paintings of the Church of Antonius at Gondar.

The early churches of Tigre have been described elsewhere in this book, as have some of the ancient sanctuaries which from an artistic point of view are more striking than the gilded and painted churches of Amhara. Mention has been made of the rock-cut churches of Lalibela, with their architectural appearance reminiscent of the Aksumite period, and there are other fine examples of this style apart from Lasta, as for instance at Sokota. But a brief description also needs to be given of the type of sanctuary most commonly constructed. The Abbey of Kusquam at Gondar, as we have seen, had a circular church surrounded by an enclosure wall with towers set at intervals to provide dwellings for the monks. The Church of Madhane-Alem, 'Saviour of the World', at Adowa is a more recent construction on the same type of plan, circular, with two concentric enclosure walls built on a large scale, and between them the magazines and dwellings for the clergy. The church itself stands on a raised circular platform with steps leading up, and consists of a double ring of columns supporting a vast conical roof and enclosing the holy of holies, which is square, and always kept closed. The outer colonnade, consisting of twenty-seven pillars of stone and brick, has three entrances; all the other openings are screened off, some of them having a wooden trellis to admit light. The entranceways give access to the front part of the sanctuary, which is reserved for the chanters and members of the clergy. The inner colonnade comprises sixteen tall pillars of wood which are linked together by screens except for four openings leading to the four doors of the holy of holies. The part between the inner wall and the holy of holies, or *maqdas*, which is covered with paintings and accessible only to high church officials and the King, is called the *qedest* and is reserved for communicants. The ceilings in this church are made entirely of reeds forming an intricate pattern of many colours, a technique still to be seen in houses at Aksum and one which was employed at Gondar, according to the chronicles, in the palace of Yasu II.

One of the outstanding features of the Christian religion in

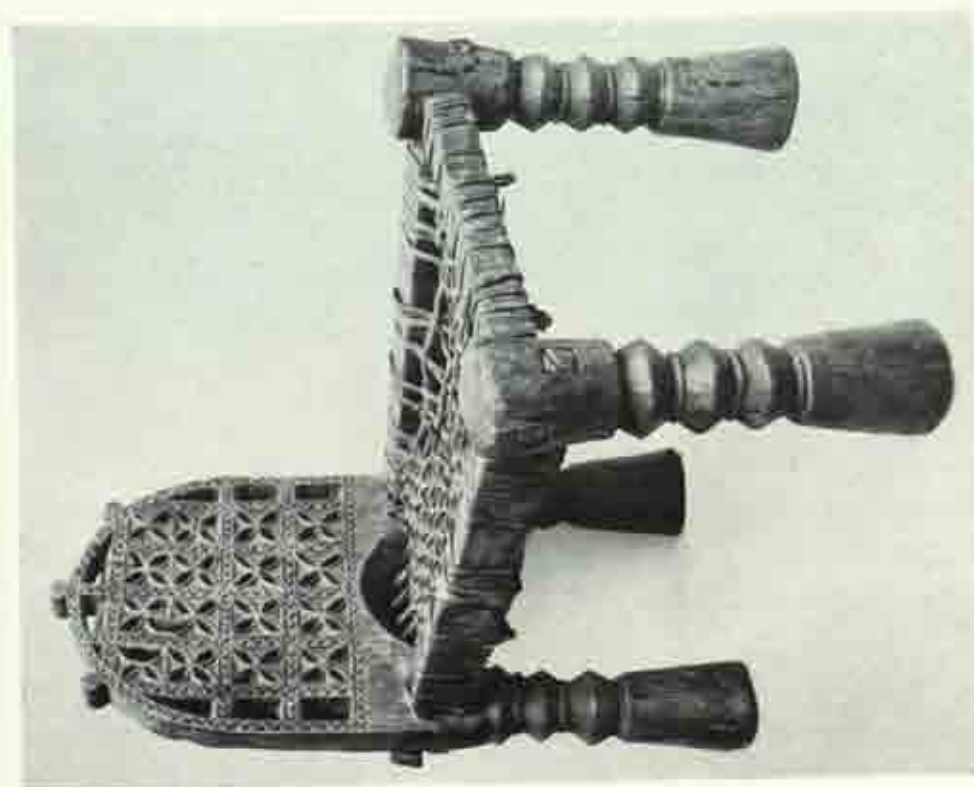
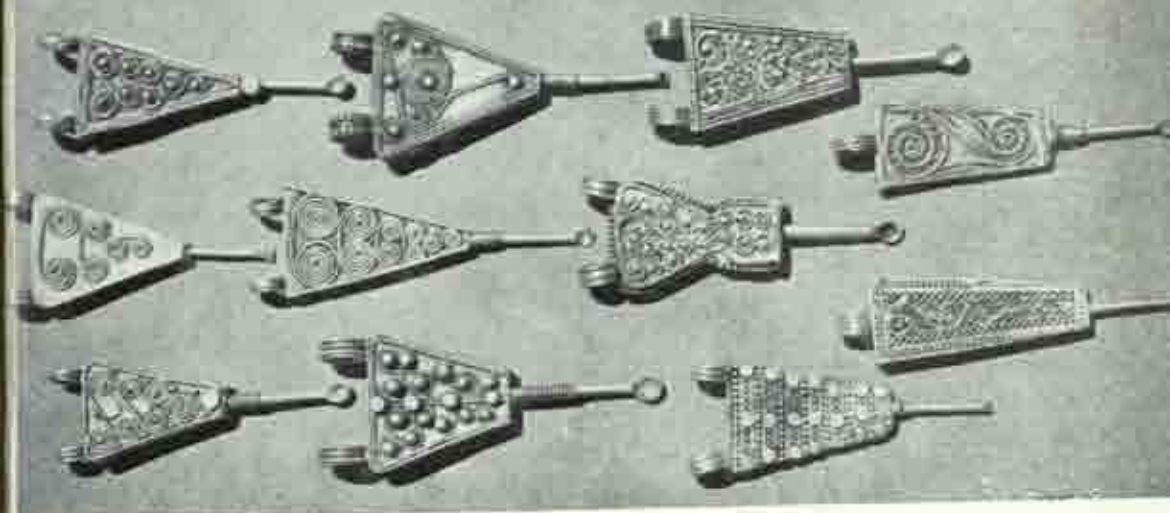


[95] Rustic dwellings in the course of construction in the mountain region of Djibouti, west of Adulis Abalaia. (Photo J. Dorestan)

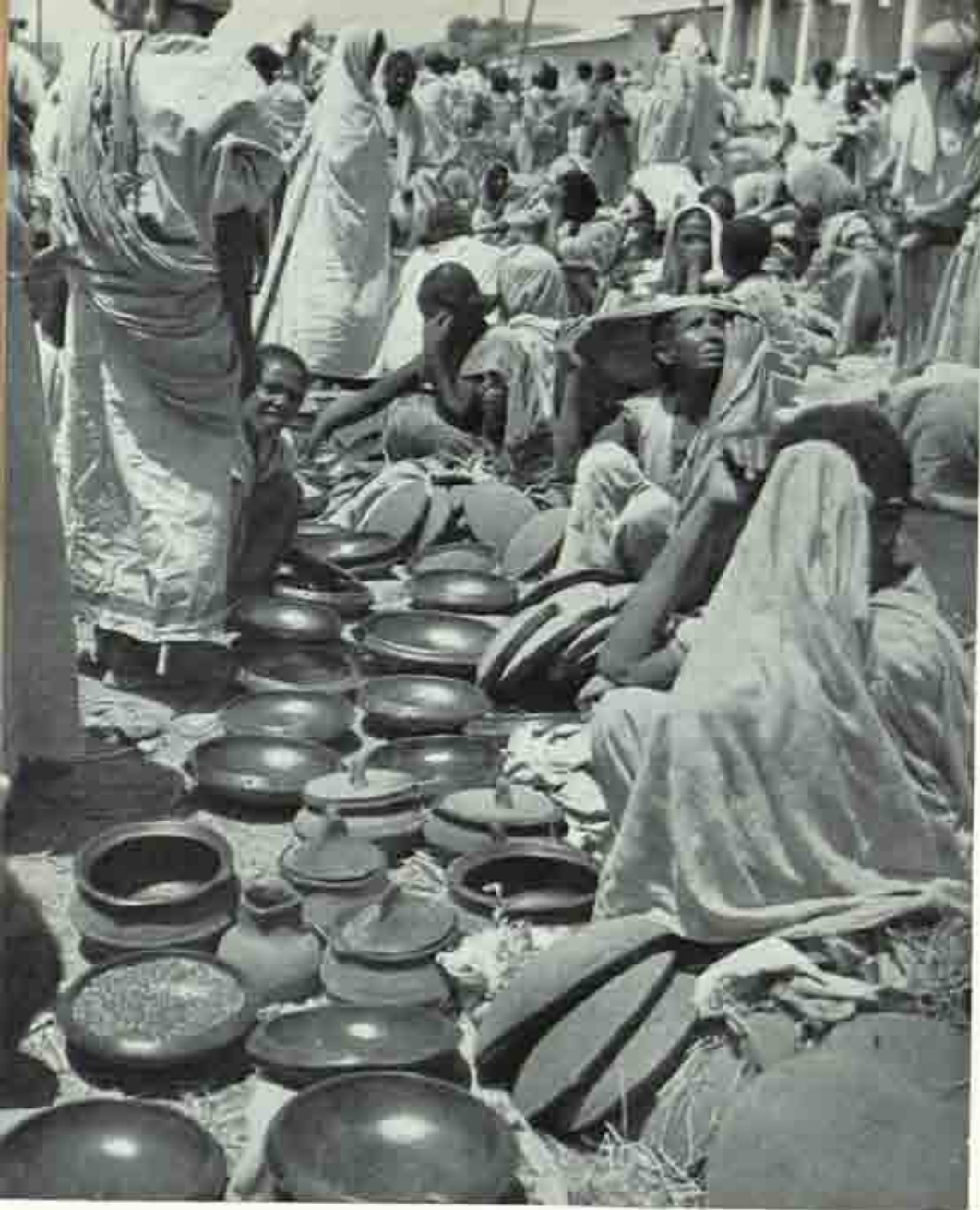


[94] Popular Number: Harp, trumpet and violin accompany the big drum, played by a woman who is heavily tattooed at the neck and wrists; the rhythm is enhanced by clapping.

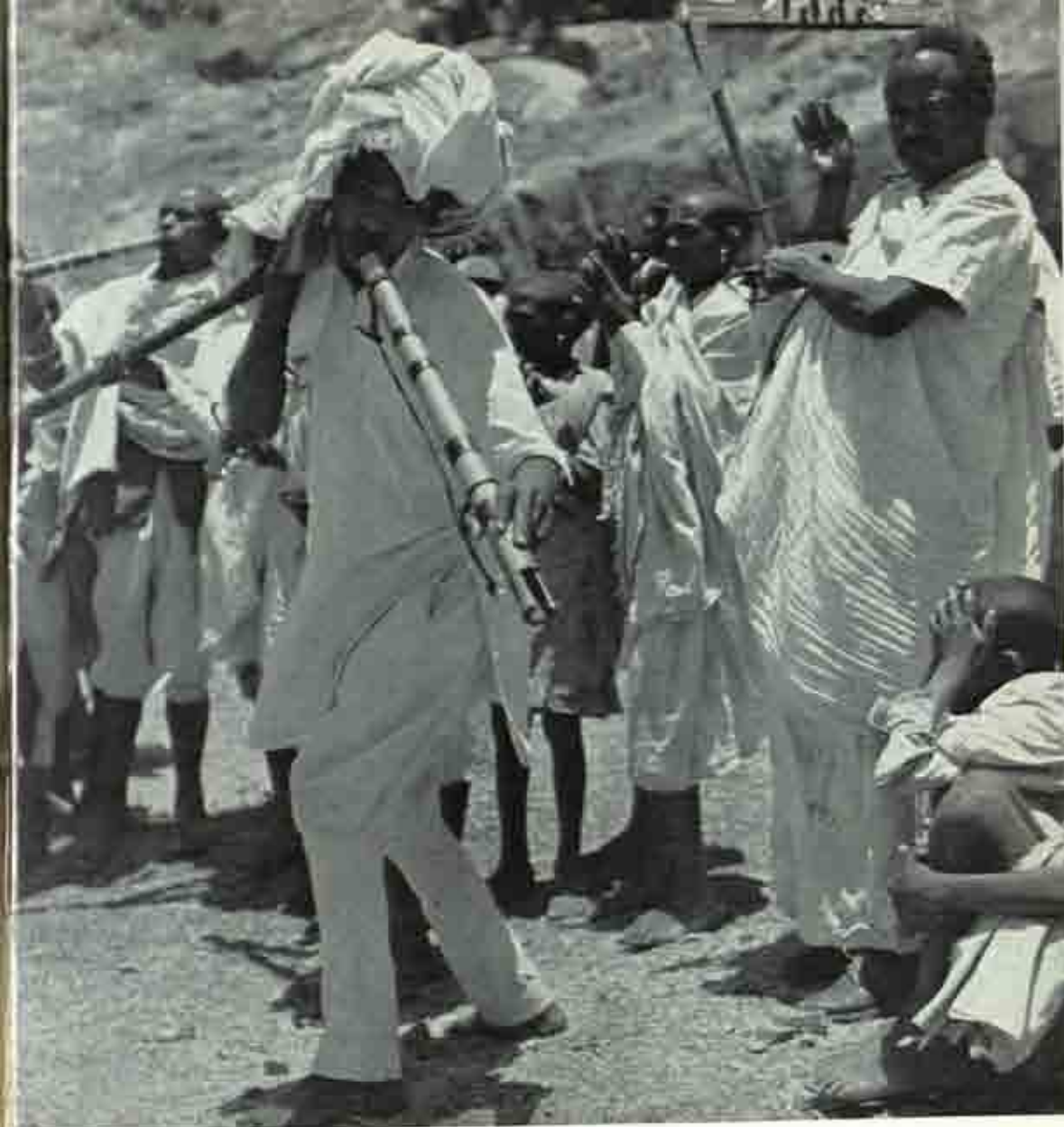
[96] Silver ear-pickers. This form of jewellery is very popular and lends itself to a variety of design (Photo J. Dorosso)



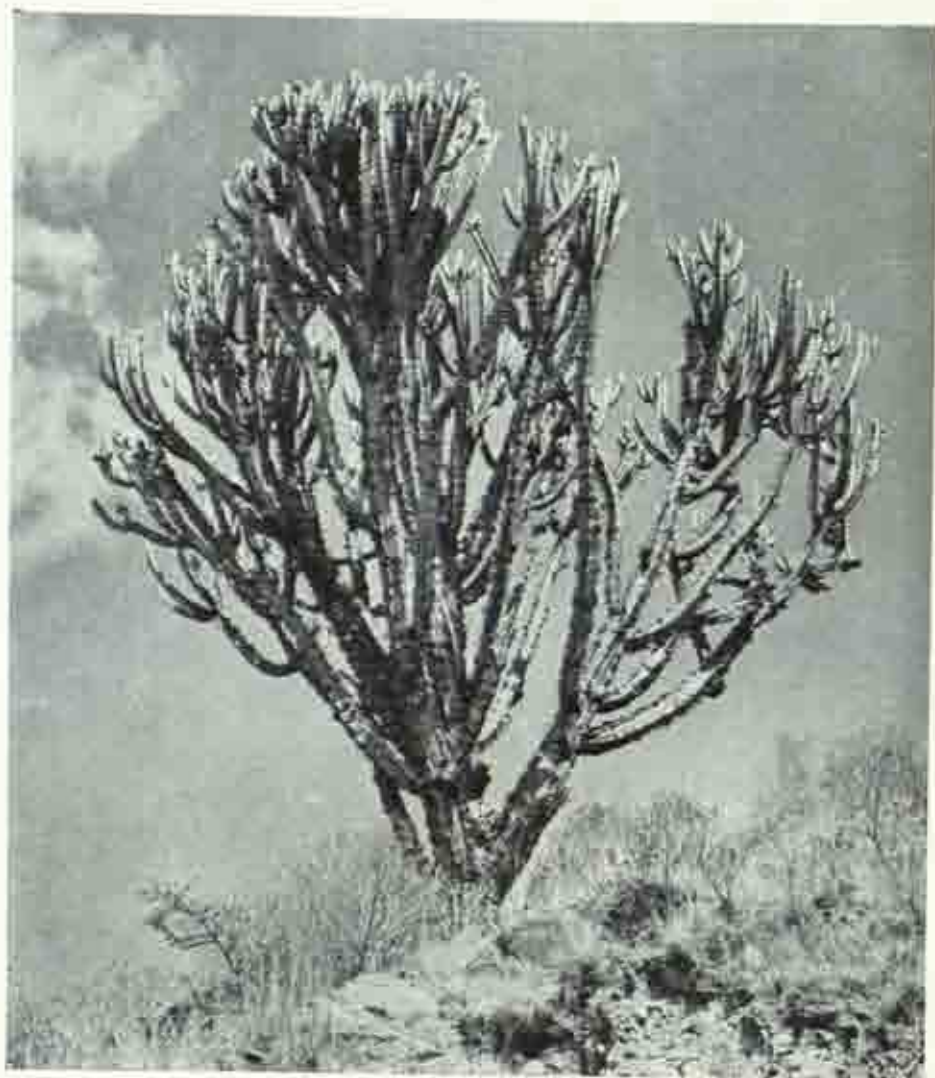
[95] Wooden chair with leather thong decoration. (Photo Musée de l'Homme)



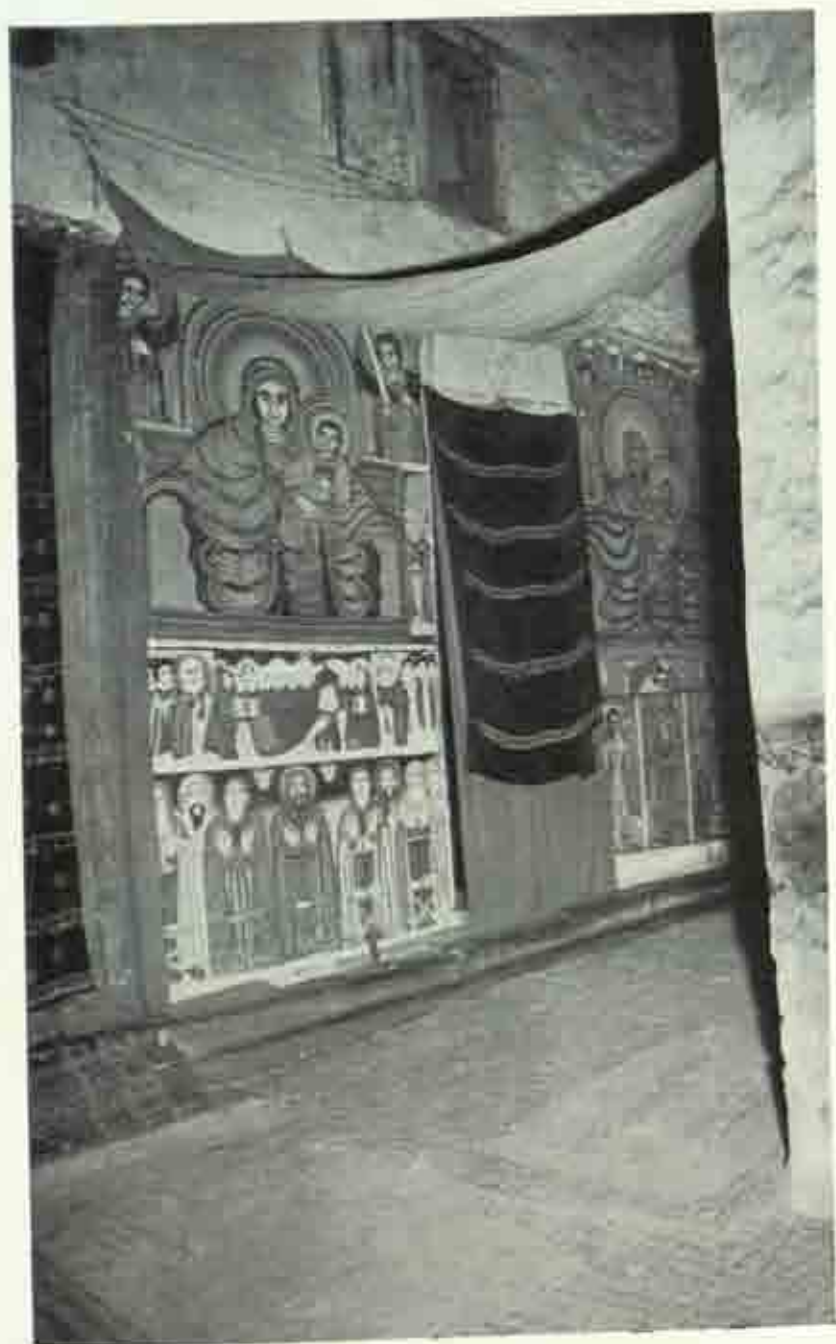
[97] Aksum: Market Scene. (Photo J. Dorese)



[98] Festival celebrations at Aksum. (Photo J. Dorisse)



[99] Arborescent Euphorbia. (Photo J. Doyesso)



[100] Aksum: The interior of the Cathedral. The sanctuary doors are framed by modern paintings. In the foreground, lowest register, is a representation of the Nine Saints who introduced monastic life to Ethiopia. (Photo J. Dorrae)



[101] Aksum: Stele with architectural decoration, lying in front of the Church of Enda-
Yesus. (Photo J. Doresse)

Ethiopia is a widespread monasticism as evinced by the countless retreats and monasteries one sees all over the country, stable communities and wandering anchorites forming part and parcel of the everyday life of the people. The convents are fairly akin to those of Coptic Egypt in their general administration. As for the hermits, it is remarkable that the peripatetic life of the ascetic still characteristic of Ethiopian monasticism has long since ceased to be a feature of Christianity elsewhere in the world.

Debra-Damo, perched high on a mountain-top and inaccessible save by a rope, has already been mentioned, and so has Debra-Libanos, the great monastery at Ham. On the islands of Lake Tana there are some twenty monasteries and churches, some of which go back to the fourteenth century; some of them are thought to contain treasures hidden there during the various upheavals. On the islands of Daga, Kafran, and Matraha there are royal sepulchres. Everywhere there are round churches and rectangular ones, rising out of the tangled undergrowth, with diminutive dwellings grouped around them.

In the low-lying regions of Woldebba where the heat is stifling and pestilence is rife there are some interesting hermitages, used as a retreat from time to time by prominent individuals. Bruce has nothing good to say about them. 'Admittedly', he wrote, 'the monks are held in great veneration. They are supposed to have the gift of prophecy and to be able to work miracles . . . There are also a number of women there whom one might describe as nuns, and who, although they do not live there all the time, are in the habit of visiting there and dwelling with the monks in a familiarity which is possibly not entirely spiritual'. Such venomous insinuations are in fact a gross distortion of the Ethiopian monastic existence, and stories of the terrifying wastes that surround Debra-Abbai are associated only with hermits whose ascetism appals even their fellow-monks.

Even if all her churches and treasures had been lost to Ethiopia, her past would still survive in the manuscripts, thanks to the work of countless monks and scholars. Some of these literary works, translated from the Coptic originals or a purely native output, have already been referred to in connexion with the reigns during which they were produced. But the lives of the local saints and the various chronicles are colourfully recorded with great originality of writing, and there can be few communities which have delighted to the same extent in the poetical expression of their religion. What strikes one most of all is the way in which these magnificent and highly

decorative parchments bring to life contemporary events, the copyist diligently recording the various circumstances that surrounded his work, jubilant or cast into despair by some historic episode, with perhaps an additional note by some official of the monastery relating to its foundation and endowments, to ensure in times of stress that such records should not be lost. In the last few pages of an Evangelistary from Lake Haik, for instance, there occurs the record of the endowment of certain lands from 1350 onwards, accompanied by terrible maledictions upon anyone who sought to rob the convent of its estates, together with the exhortation to celebrate annually the commemoration of the dead for which certain sums had been provided. Again, at the end of another Evangelistary which was presented by King Sayfa-'Arad in the fourteenth century to the Egyptian convent of Kusquam, there is a list drawn up by the Ethiopian community there, detailing gifts of altar cloths, houses, and cattle, a cow being offered by the priest Gebra-Mikael 'in honour of the Four Celestial Animals', symbolizing the Evangelists; this is followed by regulations concerning the life of the convent and an excommunication directed against a prior who had fraudulently sold this volume.

Perhaps the best example comes at the end of a collection of *Malka*, or series of invocations, addressed to the Holy Virgin, where there is an eloquent and moving postscript written by a pilgrim, Takla-Alfa, who had started off on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem:

'These *Malka* of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the *Malka* of Our Lady Mary were written by me in the land of Dongola at the time of my sojourn there in the midst of the Moslems. I, Takla-Alfa, miserable sinner, wrote these words at the time when I was on my way to Jerusalem and no longer had a camel upon which to mount to return to my native land of Ethiopia nor, in order to reach Jerusalem, either the strength or the resources; for in that place there is nothing but desert, with no water or shade! Having not the wherewithal to go on, I stayed alone in Dongola in the midst of the Nubians and the Moslems. Now they with one accord had made accusation against my son, who, having chosen Christ, died in Dongola. On the day of his death a great light descended upon his sepulchre, and it was witnessed by every man . . . after the sun had gone down . . . And I fasted, weeping and lamenting . . . with no sanctuary for my faith, fearing morning and evening the end of my Christian faith, day and night repeating the Psalms and Hours, for forty days. Now, on the third day of the month of Hedar I was approached by Our

Lady Mary and her Son Jesus-Christ, and with them Michael and Gabriel and others of the heavenly host, praising her with sweet singing which delighted the heart. She entered into the house where I found myself, in the middle of the night, and said to me: "Set down in writing my *Malka* and the *Malka* of my Son" . . . !"

The manuscripts, besides their great human interest, are also distinguished by their fine calligraphy and the beauty of the illustrations, which bear witness to the royal taste for the luxurious in association with religious inspiration.

Mention has already been made of the unsophisticated decoration to be found in some of the older manuscripts that have survived, with figures standing out in reds and yellows against a dark blue background. One of the finest examples comes from the collection of d'Abbadie, with over twenty pages adorned with crudely coloured figures in an intricate composition resembling a tapestry, showing the main scenes from the life of Christ, the saintly cavaliers George and Theodore, and also Moses, David, Solomon, and the great Egyptian monks. The art of the mediaeval manuscripts of Ethiopia is almost all we now have to go upon to evoke the paintings that must have adorned the earliest churches, apart from a single specimen that appears authentic—a frieze of anchorites in sombre dress—and has survived in the convent of Wadi-Natrun in Egypt. These brightly coloured miniatures, whose style may have its origins amongst the Copts, Syrians, and Cappadocians, may have had their counterpart perhaps in the early frescoes admired in Mohammed's day, which were duly recorded in the Moslem traditions.

The later influence of European painters in decorative conventions as employed in the churches brought about a revival which is also apparent in various manuscripts, such as those which emerged at Gondar after the Moslem upheaval. In the illuminations of the *Miracles of the Virgin*, which was a vast work, a greater variety of styles and motifs appears to have been tried out, as is illustrated by the following four examples, all very different.

The first is a manuscript from the Cathedral at Aksum, which apparently dates from the reign of Fasiladas. Its dimensions are unusual and the lettering faultless; linked with the text are illustrations which in their turn are interspersed with captions, written in smaller letters than the text itself. The various representations of the Virgin, which dominate the page—a parchment of the purest white—are surrounded by colourful figures in an animated throng, impeccably drawn with meticulous attention to details of dress;

some of them have pointed beards, giving the face an elongated effect. Reds, yellows, a few touches of brown and some magnificent splashes of blue, suffice to make it a brilliant scene. The Ethiopian convention whereby the virtuous are represented full face and the wicked appear in profile, has not been discarded.

One of the imperial manuscripts of the eighteenth century, labelled *A* by Budge in his publication of the *Miracles*, also depicts rows of figures grouped in registers like the classical friezes. A remarkable feature is the use of diminishing tones in a highly conventional style which accentuates the faces, and the interplay of text and illustrations has been done with extraordinary skill. There is endless variety in the scenes, which show activities of all kinds and an assortment of architectural styles; the manuscript is profusely illustrated with countless representations of people, some of whom are depicted in attitudes reminiscent of older Ethiopian paintings.

Another manuscript, brought back from Makdala to the British Museum—No. XCII—dates from the Emperor Bakaffa. In this case the miniatures, instead of being interwoven with the text, are separated from it by a wide border, and within it the decorative group is made to stand out from the page by means of a background skilfully shaded off. The faces are of a pasty hue, and the colouring sombre, tending to yellow; perhaps this is a sign of Western influence.

The fourth example, which also comes from the British Museum—No. CCXV—seems to have succeeded in assimilating the new influences, and is a truly remarkable piece of work. It belongs to a type exemplified in other manuscripts which have survived at the Abbey of Kusquam at Gondar. The text, which is lettered in red and black, is interlinked with a highly ornamental design. The top of the page is decorated with a wide border of miniature flowers, whilst at the bottom the artist has grouped his trees and figures into a frame which makes them stand out most effectively. Each mantle is resplendent with embroidery, the haloes dazzle the eye in a welter of light and stars, every fold is subtly toned off, the faces are darkish and slightly effeminate, while the Virgin, with her flowing tresses, has a beauty that is almost profane! Here we have a realism combined with sheer splendour which is also apparent in other manuscripts from the same abbey; the luxury at Court, with its embroidered robes and parasols, its crowns and ceremonial swords, and the great trees and gardens around the palaces, was finding expression in the miniatures commissioned by Yasu II and Mentwab.

The imitation of Western forms sometimes went to extremes, as is amply illustrated by the Evangelistary illuminated for

Yohannes I, which is No. XXXV in the British Museum collection. Groups of figures framed in a border, against a plain parchment background, are depicted almost as if they had been traced in their various postures, with unexpected foreshortenings, dramatic attitudes, three-quarter views, and all the tricks of the schoolroom. This theatrical-looking group surrounding the figure of Christ being nailed to the Cross is remote indeed from Ethiopia.

But it is impossible to describe all the various types of Ethiopian miniature in a book such as this. It is enough perhaps to reflect, in the light of these few examples which escaped the plunder and devastation, that Ethiopia has much to be proud of in the building and embellishment of large numbers of churches, in the production of an abundant and richly assorted collection of manuscripts, and in the fashioning of jewellery and sumptuous robes. If from time to time she has encountered foreign influences which led to the facile copying of a style essentially alien to her own, it has never been long before such elements have been absorbed into her native genius.

The art of decorating and illuminating manuscripts has certainly declined in Ethiopia at the present time, a loss which is hardly compensated by the appearance of secular paintings which, though lively enough, are rather clumsily executed. The days of military pageantry are over too. But there are still the religious rites, which are remarkable for a variety and brilliance of ornament and costume which enrich the scene, always a tremendous spectacle of colour and movement, as in the Feast of the Holy Cross or the Feasts of St. Michael. One of the most picturesque is that of the Epiphany, or *Tamkat*, at which all the faithful come with great fervour to be rebaptized, the clergy bringing out the *tabots* from the churches and carrying them in procession down to the river banks, where the great crosses are symbolically dipped in the water. But it is at Aksum, at the sacred rites of the Feast of Our Lady of Zion, or still more on the Saturday and Sunday of the Festival of Palms, that pageantry soars to its noblest heights. Here the choir of *dabtaras* clad in their long sacred decorated scarves intone an expressive chant as they slowly advance towards the cathedral, alternately prostrating themselves and rising again, gesturing in the manner depicted in the ceremonial manuscripts of centuries long ago. To the beat of the drums, which are solemn and slow, the clergy advance in two long lines, facing each other in their embroidered capes and snow-white turbans, lifting the sistrum, a legacy of the Ancient Egyptians, meeting, crossing, and retreating in a very slow dance which dates from time immemorial.

XIV

THE WAY OF THE PEOPLE

THIS book would be incomplete without a bird's-eye view of the countryside and its inhabitants. The Ethiopian provinces as they are today extend over an area more than twice the size of France, and the population, whose distribution is mainly confined to the more habitable zones, amounts to some ten million. Of these, it is estimated that there are about four million confirmed Christians and three and a half million more or less orthodox Moslems, the rest, apart from minor Jewish Falasha groups, being pagan.

Any attempt to assess the basic characteristics of this motley assemblage—Ethiopia has been described as a 'museum' of peoples, languages, and faiths—would necessitate an account not only of the peoples of Tigre and Amhara who inherited the Aksumite traditions, but of their kinsmen the Gurage also, and the Agaw, and more particularly the Galla, breeders of huge-horned cattle, with their curious social structure based on age-groups, which still survives among certain tribes. One would need to describe the Moslems of the great-walled city of Harar, the Somali groups, the 'Adali, and those of Danakil, who wear practically nothing and always seem to be vaguely on the move, pulling a camel behind them. Then there are the hirsute Assaorta tribes, and a host of others who in many cases are the descendants of the primitive inhabitants encountered by travellers of old along the coast of the Erythraean Sea.

But it is the Christian inhabitants of Tigre and Amhara who have inherited the Sabaeen legacy and who, though they have certain racial differences and do not speak the same tongue, have been the makers of Ethiopian history, establishing a national Church and creating its religious art and a wealth of literature written in Geez. These two provinces have many traditions in common, including one feature of dress which is of special interest, the white *shamma* worn in the ancient style, which distinguishes them from all other tribes and makes them the *gens togata* of the Empire. Geographically they are alike in occupying the great uplands of

Ethiopia, which form a distinctive area and where, between 6,000 and 7,000 feet up, they have been free to found and foster their civilization. The greater part of the huge massif which commands the Ethiopian deserts is thus shared by these peoples.

Tigre lies to the north, with high plateaus, sparsely populated, dominated only by clumps of giant euphorbia like huge candelabra, and a great series of *ambas*, flat-topped and crowned with trees and houses; the intervening valleys are hot and covered with spiky vegetation. At the edge of the Eritrean plateau lies Asmara, which is half Italian and half Moslem, rather too neatly laid out by its European architects, and linked lower down with the port of Massawa. Then there is Makalle with its two palaces, one of which stands forsaken as if in exile upon a vast expanse of plain, under an immense sky. Aksum, with its ancient stelae and cathedral, its narrow alleyways and neat round houses, forms a self-contained unit for the devout. Finally there is Adowa on the fringe of a mountain range, clustered around the great circular church of the Saviour of the World.

Tigre is strewn with the ruins of ancient cities. But it is also an area for which the monasteries have always had a certain predilection, many of them having enjoyed a long life as the intellectual nucleus of the country, including Debra-Bizan, which faces Asmara from its isolated hill-top; the inaccessible Tsa'ad-Amba situated on a formidable spur not far from Keren; Debra-Libanos at Ham; the convent of Abba Garima in the mountains of Adowa; Debra-Damo, their great rival, high on the plateau; Gunda-Gundet, with its rich collection of manuscripts, at the bottom of a steep valley falling away to the desert; and the primitive and unsalubrious retreats of Woldebba.

But Tigre, the birthplace of imperial and religious traditions which it has preserved over a lengthy period, with its holy city of Aksum dating from earliest times, has nevertheless always been comparatively poor owing to its aridity. The small village houses, stone-built, square, and flat-roofed, and the rectangular churches with their buttressed walls, sometimes with crenellations on top, make it obvious that this was the locality where architecture began to develop, and as we have seen there are a number of architectural features still employed which date back more than two thousand years, the timbered-framework effect being only one of these. At Aksum, on the other hand, the houses are circular, with conical roofs; some of them are quite high buildings, occasionally with rectangular annexes of one or more storeys. The architecture here

has undoubtedly also been influenced by ancient styles; the interiors are ingeniously designed, with a central room, which is square, and broad alcoves opening off in the form of a cross, forming bedrooms or domestic storerooms. The whole ensemble is crowned by a ceiling made of coloured reeds arranged artistically in a kind of mosaic and supported by beams, which are often decorated with paintings. The local inhabitants are more highly skilled than anywhere else in the province in the arts of building, painting, copying and binding manuscripts, embroidering, and making jewellery in chased metal work. But in the course of the general impoverishment their other talents are no longer evident. The huge fashionable residences of which only traces survive in the shape of enclosure walls here and there, surrounding a central building for official receptions, with the private apartments away to the rear, must have belonged to wealthy folk in rather more prosperous days. All trace of such luxury has gone and the neighbourhood now is the home of a very much humbler population. One sees them running to fetch water, peasant women young and old, always looking slightly scared, and usually none too clean in their attire. The more leisured type of woman in her own home, her hair smoothly plastered down in thin straight plaits, often wears a long white robe made of thick cotton and ornamented down the front with a narrow band of many-coloured embroidery, sometimes enhanced with spangles. The sumptuous mantles of the old days, only a few photographs of which now survive as souvenirs, seem to have completely disappeared. Saddles richly decked with gold ornament and ceremonial shields of various kinds were bequeathed by their last owners to the Church and are brought out from time to time to add to the splendour of a procession. Nowadays the men are content to wear the accepted Ethiopian dress, which consists of long white pants and shirt made of linen, over which they drape the *shamma*, toga-style, of white calico, rather coarser in the north than in Shoa; the clergy wear a black cape for everyday use, and the monks a tall turban of white or yellow.

At Asmara, although the men generally favour European dress, the Eritrean women, who are shrill-voiced and vivacious, with their hair either bunched up in front or plaited on top, still wear the white robe of Tigre, varying this occasionally with European calico dresses in bright colours. They like to drape themselves in a light *shamma*, rather like a scarf though often more elaborate, using it partly as a head covering or letting one corner dip down in a triangle to the middle of the back, sometimes almost to the ground. These women

keep their houses spruce, painting their furniture red or blue to keep it in shining condition, and regularly whitewashing the walls of their tiny abodes, hanging up an assortment of wickerwork trays or, more effective still, the great enamelled dishes that are made in Belgium or Japan, decorated with flowers in reds and yellows.

All kinds of influences have combined to produce the northern fashions in dress as well as many of the local customs; some are essentially Ethiopian and rooted in ancient traditions, others have been borrowed from Yemenite prototypes, from the Sudanese, or from European practices. But although many of the details have a long history behind them, it is misleading to judge the whole of Ethiopian tradition by the light of these surviving elements or the picturesque folk who cling to them in this area. In order to get a rather less one-sided view one needs to take a look at some of the thriving market-towns of Wollo, Amhara, and Shoa.

Here in the upland country the kings of old made strenuous efforts to resist the Moslem invaders and the Galla tribes, who were forever encroaching on the neighbouring slopes, bent on settling within the inviting plateau-land. The development and preservation of Ethiopia as a nation is undoubtedly due to the fact that local conditions in this mountainous region are particularly favourable to life.

Over the whole of this area, which includes Lasta, Amhara, Menz, Tegulat, Shoa and Gojjam, there is a series of huge mountain ranges interspersed with extensive plateaus, the latter more or less linked with each other by means of passes and ridgeways, with deep gorges splitting the landscape at intervals. There are flat-topped *ambas* with precipitous flanks, wide plains rich in vegetation set amid the mountain-tops, and magnificent lakes encompassed by the hills, with a denuded volcanic cone or chimney here or there. In these majestic surroundings it is always fresh and tranquil, the atmosphere is extraordinarily clear, and the climate temperate or even cold. Apart from the rainy season, when every hollow is turned into a torrent, there are springs and streams of health-giving water; the natural vegetation is varied without being too prolific, and the crops are easy to grow without undue toil. Dotted about on the steep slopes or high upon apparently inaccessible plateaus are the little villages with their thatched roofs and round churches half-hidden in the trees. Small towns have grown up here and there, overlooking the great valleys, at the top of a much-frequented pass, in the midst of pastoral plains in the interior, or at the edge of a

plateau commanding an aerial view of the deserts bathed in sunlight below; they are used as market-centres rather than for habitation, and every second house is likely to be an inn. The big cities such as Addis-Ababa, with buildings of every architectural style sprawled over a space some six miles wide, are a modern anomaly. Dessi is one of these, a huge commercial centre where it is frequently cold and misty, with buildings roofed in corrugated iron, crowded together among the rows of eucalyptus trees. Then there is Gondar with its ruined palaces, its schools of religious learning and sacred music; the ancient capitals such as Debra-Berhan, still the centre for various local fairs, and Ankober, almost forgotten now and yet an inspiring site away on the eastern edge of Shoa. All these centres, and many others as well, mark the caravan routes of old, unchanged right up to modern times. Some of these ancient highways are now much less familiar to European travellers than in the days gone by; the route that goes by way of Makdala to Debra-Tabor and Lake Tana, for instance, is almost unknown, as is the ancient track from Lalibela to Sokota. Visitors from the West used to follow the winding road across the ridges inhabited by Christian civilized communities; now everyone seems to prefer the new motor roads, which take a shorter cut from the lowlands. The most ancient tracks of all, such as those which led from Zaila and Tadjurah to Ankober, are now devoid of life.

The monasteries and great sanctuaries of the Amhara region are less ancient than those in the north. Some were built in secluded spots such as the various lake islands, or in the vicinity of a miraculous spring as in the case of Debra-Libanos in Shoa. Others, such as the Amba-Geshena or the monastery of Abbo above the crater lake of Zukwala, were deliberately sited at an ancient centre of pagan worship in the hope of supplanting the cult.

Within this common framework there are distinctive landscapes and correspondingly distinctive racial types and characters, which have been aptly analysed by the Ethiopians themselves. They maintain that altitude and orientation are the factors producing a certain nuance between the three main types of countryside, which they term *dega*, *kuolla*, and *waina-dega*; the *dega* is the great plateau, which is between 9,000 and 10,000 feet high in places, buffeted by cold winds with few trees to break their force, rich in springs, and characterized by the flowerings of strange giant lobelias. The *kuolla* designates the valleys and hot plains sunk far below the plateau. Here the atmosphere is dry and springs are rare. The vegetation, which consists of thorny scrub, makes a spirited appear-

ance after the rainy season, and withers away during the rest of the year, when bush fires often devastate large areas. Further down the valleys the trees become gigantic and wild fauna abound, both large and small. Half-way between the *dega* and the *kuolla*, the *waina-dega*, or vine-country, is situated on the plateau, receiving plenty of sun, and wind in moderation; here the towns and villages grow up, their crops and cattle somewhat reminiscent of ours in Western Europe. Even the vegetation resembles ours, in appearance if not in species, apart from the candelabra-euphorbia, bamboos, enormous juniper trees, and the *musa-anseta*, or false banana. It is now the realm of the eucalyptus, which provides shelter from the wind and timber in abundance for building purposes.

The most engaging résumé of the main characteristics of the inhabitants of these regions comes from Arnaud d'Abbadie. The man of the *kuolla*, he says, is lively and boisterous, a lover of festivities, ornament, dancing and music. The native of the *dega*, on the other hand, is restrained in his gestures, serious and of a contemplative turn of mind, speaking little and appearing somewhat dour.

Amongst the women, the contrast is even more marked:

'The women of the *kuolla* appear to be the prettiest and the most attractive, and they know exactly how to dress with the greatest coquetry in their "togas"; they have quick tempers, which however do not last long; they are well-groomed, their expression is sweet, they carry themselves with elegance and grace, their figures are perfectly formed, and they are notoriously fickle, all of which is enough to justify the proverbial jealousy of their husbands.

'The women of the *dega* are bigger and stronger, but they are less prepossessing, less gracious, and less fecund, so they say; they are however more hardworking, more thrifty, less capricious, and more obedient; they are beautiful rather than pretty, and appear to be less seductive than the women of the *kuollas*, but in the long run they command more respect from the family.'

The people of the *waina-dega* appear to be a cross between the two, but they are townspeople rather than peasants; craftsmen, musicians, lawyers, jesters and professors all seem to be drawn principally from amongst them. But there is general agreement that they are inconstant, idle, and entirely lacking in scruples!

In external appearance these people are rather more alike than in their personalities. Admittedly one may still see some notable going out with an escort of riders bearing guns, a cavalier appearing at a feast with his lance and buckler, or a matron boldly riding forth in

her sombre cape, accompanied by footmen, one carrying his mistress's drinking horn in its leather case; and it is quite common to meet a young proud peasant girl on the back of a trotting mule, or a hermit on foot, going from village to village to preach, with a wild look in his eye, brandishing an iron staff with a cross at the tip. But the distinctive garments that used to be worn by persons of nobility, with all their brocade and velvet and gleaming jewellery, or the soldier's finery with flashing bucklers and huge swords inscribed in Geez, are no longer to be seen.

The men of this region wear trousers and tunic, usually immaculately white, and over these the *shamma*, made of a light cotton fabric with a geometric design, sometimes in colour, woven in to form a border. It is draped according to the demands of courtesy rather than antiquity, and may be worn differently in different circumstances, as befits a journey, or being presented to someone of high rank, or attending church, or taking part in the celebration of a feast. Additional cover against the rain is favoured by both men and women in the shape of a heavy felt cape, which is conical and has openings for the head and arms; shepherds, who go bare-legged, content themselves with a cape of skins sewn together.

The woman's long white robe, which is characteristically Ethiopian, is drawn up into gathers at the back, and the breasts are accentuated by a high girdle which affords plenty of scope for coquetry. The border at the hem usually matches the decoration on the *shamma*, the latter serving as a scarf, cape, or mantle, or as a veil in moments of flirtation. A brightly-coloured silk kerchief is knotted over the head to cover the hair, which is very thick and usually dressed on top. The townsfolk have taken a liking in recent times to wearing white thonged sandals, which show up their dark feet to great advantage. Jewellery, especially bracelets, rings, and ear-picks made of silver are greatly appreciated, but the variety of crosses is even more bewildering, some of them having Portuguese or Coptic designs, while others are copies of the decorative patterns that appear in some of the manuscripts. However, not everyone wears this symbol, since a simple coloured band worn around the neck, called the *mateb*, is enough to indicate that the wearer is a Christian.

The names are decorative in themselves; amongst the men's names are Ubye, 'My Beauty', Abebe, 'He hath blossomed', and Haile-Maryam, 'Strength of Mary'; and amongst the women's, Zawditu, 'His Diadem', Negatoa, 'Aurora', and Itanech, 'Thou art my Sister'.

The great residences which so charmed the travellers of last century were replaced by houses in European style at about the same time that the finery began to disappear from everyday life. It is only in the habitations of the ordinary people that the Ethiopian love of colour is apparent nowadays. The country cottages with conical roofs have tended to be superseded in more built-up areas by rectangular houses with roofs of corrugated iron. In most cases both types have walls of wattle and daub. They are somewhat fragile and do not stand up to many rainy seasons, so that they are continually having to be rebuilt. The furniture is just enough for basic needs, chairs and beds in the old style being gradually replaced, in the market-towns at least, by modern pieces. There is a brazier for heating and cooking purposes. Wickerwork baskets, usually in bright colours, are still used for meals, being placed on a kind of pedestal, usually of the same material. There is hardly a home, however poor, which has not a portrait of the Royal Family hung on the wall. In the towns the chief luxury takes the form of curtains in a light fabric, green, yellow, or red, which are hung across the only room to partition it off into 'bedrooms'. On Feast Days the ground is strewn with fresh herbs, and each day after the meal is over the mistress of the house places a few grains of incense upon the hot embers brought to her by the servant of the house. This practice is exactly that of the Roman house as described in a song of the tenth century: *Ibi sunt sedilia strata/et domus velis ornata/floresque in domo sparguntur/herbeque fragantes miscentur*: 'There the couches are made ready and the house is adorned with veils; flowers are strewn within the house and mingled with sweet-smelling herbs. . . .' The whole poem is worth quoting, for the life it depicts, interspersed with conversations and singing, is strangely identical with the peaceful life of the Ethiopian plateau.

For Ethiopian life has great charm. The people of this region, who are given to coquetry as a harmless pastime, and are most meticulous over the snowy laundering of their garments, do not live only for work or household cares, or for their meals,—meat or vegetables according to the season, served with the fiery red sauce made from the berberis plant, with pancakes of millet taking the place of bread. The simple pleasures of social life, which has strict conventions, are something even the humblest likes to enjoy, with singing and dancing and especially conversation, the latter having a particular charm on account of the subtleties of Amharic. It is pleasant to go into the local houses and village bars, which are always presided over by a woman, whose authority no one would

dream of challenging. Here one can drink the local beer and listen to an assortment of songs, accompanied with great virtuosity on the one-stringed violin or *másenko*, or on a kind of lyre known as the *kerar*. Ethiopian life, which some have censured rather strongly, has never shocked men such as Bruce, Arnaud d'Abbadie, or Rochet d'Héricourt, who knew it intimately. In some ways it is even reminiscent of the seventeenth century in Western Europe. The Ethiopian has great rhetorical gifts, as is shown by the chronicles, and he is a poet at heart; his wife, who is proud and free like her spouse, will counter his flow of eloquence with an admirable display of wit. Epigrams worthy of a Greek anthology alternate with poetry such as the famous lyrical ballad from Tigre about the beautiful Mamat who drove all her lovers to despair: 'Her heart is closed like a coffer!' cries the poet, adding as consolation 'Like the Lord above, thou slayest and thou forgivest . . .' For, it must be remembered, the Ethiopian is brought up on the Bible, in which, as he well knows, the Song of Songs more than makes up for the austerity of *Deuteronomy* and the pessimism of *Ecclesiastes*.

Feast Days are a great event in the lives of these people. They hasten in a great throng to join the procession of clergy in many-coloured robes carrying crowns and crosses. Amongst the ceremonies already alluded to they particularly enjoy the *Maskal*, or Feast of the Cross, which coincides with the end of the rainy season; *Hossanna*, the Palm Festival, which ushers in Easter and the end of Lent; and *Tamkat*, the Epiphany, the day when the women and girls put on their best dresses and try to look as dignified as possible. '*Tamkat arradegna*,' 'Tamkat has killed me', runs the saying, which refers to the sad plaints of all those unfortunates who on this day were seduced by some gay deceiver whom they have been foolish enough to marry. Before a wedding there are great celebrations for several days, beer and mead being drunk in large quantities so that all the guests are rapidly overcome, while the dancing goes on for hours at a time to the dull thudding of the drums.

One would have liked to say something of family life, in which the woman is regarded as head of the house; of religion in private life; of births and deaths, magic practices and divination, and the curious cult of the *zar*-spirits. One would have liked to give some account of the relations which exist between the upper classes and the ordinary people, and of the various social problems such as slavery, which has been the scourge of Africa, numerous Christian rulers having taken steps to put an end to it by effective reform on humane lines. Last but not least, one would have liked to give some

idea of the multitude of regulations, mitigated to some extent nowadays, which relate to disputes and lawsuits and which have made Ethiopians one of the most legally-minded nations in the world. This fact is the outcome not so much of a love of quibbling for its own sake, though the Ethiopians are argumentative by nature, as of the need in ancient times to establish justice and liberty throughout the land.

All these things tell the same story. Details of dress, private life, ceremonial pageantry, all seem to have continued unchanging for the last thousand years, while a chance word, a gesture, perhaps a characteristic attitude, can suddenly take one back into a period much more remote, evoking a simplicity of life that belongs to the ancient world. The unspoilt, unchanging countryside, the colour everywhere, the graceful, unhurried movements of the native people and their love of tranquillity and friendly intercourse, all these things have a freshness worthy of the great classical periods, an impression which is strengthened by the spotless white robes that are so carefully draped. 'The statue of Polymnia', wrote Arnaud d'Abbadie, 'bears a startling resemblance to the typical young Ethiopian girl of noble birth', and he adds: 'There has been more than one Ethiopian who, though he had never heard of Caesar's end, covered his face with his toga and died before his assassins.'

* * *

In the course of this book an attempt has been made to outline the factors which brought Ethiopia to the fore, rather than what made her civilization distinctive. Historically speaking, it is thus incomplete. It must have been apparent to the reader that the country is one that has vast potentialities for research into its history and art, with all its different races and tongues, their traditions and their literature. Too little has been said about religious beliefs, poetry, and social institutions; and there is a darker side to the picture which has not been unduly emphasized, periods of difficulty and weakness that have been so exaggerated by some that they tend to appear out of all proportion to the rest of her history. What is remarkable is the fact that Ethiopia should have succeeded in surmounting such difficulties and gradually eliminating the decay that had set in.

A variety of judgements have been passed on the history of Ethiopia, two of which, with nearly a century between them, are perhaps worth quoting. The first comes from one of Ethiopia's

firmest friends, Arnaud d'Abbadie, who had predicted Theodore's rise to power and who, as he looked back over the past, had had a presentiment perhaps of the rise of Menelik and all that he accomplished: 'One after another, dynasties have risen and passed away, some of them the greatest the world has ever known,' he writes, 'while Ethiopia has continued to control the destinies of numberless peoples in East Africa and Arabia'. The second is that of the great historian C. Conti-Rossini; it was written in 1925 in the interrogative, as a heading to his *Storia d'Etiopia*. Note the date, and the author's name! After 1941 these words have an even greater significance:

'What role does Fate intend, in the course of future moves within the Dark Continent, for the one African community which has succeeded in remaining free? More than two thousand years of history, of independence defended with determination, of wars against everything and everybody, are assuredly a great responsibility for a race of human beings to carry!'

To this question, thirty years of the reign of His Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, have already elicited an answer in full and in keeping with the noblest traditions of the country, demonstrating to all that nothing can in effect suppress the freedom of Ethiopia.

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INDEX

- Abba-Pantaleon, 27, 53-54, 81
 Abyssinia, Abyssians, 7, 88, 122, 126, 196
 Addis Ababa, 205, 226
 Aden, 85, 87
 Adowa, 28, 53, 81, 157, 202, 207-8, 225
 Adulis, 17, 26, 28, 30-31, 51, 82, 85, 89
 Aedesius, 50, 62
 Aeschylus, 7, 19
 Afilas, 29, 60
 Africa, African, 10, 17, 19, 50, 124, 230, 232
 Agaw, 64, 92-95, 115, 116, 120, 156, 180, 222
 Aguezat, 21, 25, 27, 29-30, 49, 50, 87
 Aksum, Aksumite, 7, 10-11, 13-16, 18, 22, 26-32, 49-50, 53-62, 81-95, 95-96, 115, 116-17, 124, 126, 145, 149, 151, 156, 158, 178, 180, 186, 205, 208, 219, 221-3
 Aksum, Book of, 16, 58
 Albuquerque, 9, 125
 Alexander the Great, 19
 Alexandria, Alexandrian, 81-82, 90, 114, 118, 157
 Alvarez, Francisco, 9, 26, 95, 207, 234
 Amba-Alagi, 26, 122, 126, 146, 202
 Amhara, Amharic, 21, 25, 26, 32, 90-91, 93, 113, 128, 149, 157, 160, 198-9, 208, 222, 225-6, 229
 Ankober (?Kabar), 91, 195, 226
 Arab, Arabs, 86-88, 90, 124
 Arabia, Arabian, Arabic, 11, 14-15, 21-25, 26-30, 49-50, 52, 60, 62, 85, 85, 87-88, 126, 146, 149, 252
 Architecture, 21, 25, 51-52, 54-61, 82-85, 85, 88, 95, 115, 117, 125, 128, 145, 148-9, 157, 160, 179, 184-90, 202-8, 217, 220-1, 225-4, 226, 229
 Ark (of Covenant), 13, 14, 94, 158, 180
 Armenia, Armenians, 8, 85, 94, 118-19, 179, 180
 Art (and Craft), 22-25, 31, 49, 52, 54-57, 60-61, 85-86, 90, 95-96, 115-14, 117-20, 126, 128, 145, 157, 160, 179, 184, 186, 188-9, 205-8, 218-22, 224, 228
 Ashangi, Lake, 126, 146
 Asia, Asiatic, 7, 85, 124
 Asmara, 7, 82, 126, 225, 224
 Awash, River, 19, 91, 116
 Awsta, Lake, 19, 150, 201, 203
 Azhi, 22, 27, 32, 49, 61
 'Abraha, 52, 64, 84
 'Abreha, 86, 87
 'Adal, 115, 121, 125, 125-6, 128, 147-8, 150, 220
 'Amda-Seyon, 116-17, 119
 'Arwe, 15, 17 (see also King-serpent)
 'Asbeha, 52, 64, 84
 Ba'eda-Maryam, 122
 Bakaffa, 182-4, 188, 198, 220
 Bali, 115, 122, 128
 Baraka, River, 19, 20, 26, 92, 122
 Begameder, 93, 116, 118, 149, 185, 195-5
 Beja tribes, 30, 85, 88-90, 92
 Bent, T., 11
 Berbera, 26, 124, 202
 Berhan-Mogasa, 182-5 (see also Mentwab and Walatta-Giyorgis)
 Bible, Biblical, 10, 13-14, 62, 64, 82, 89, 96, 117, 157, 179, 195, 205, 250
 Bihat, 85, 93, 116
 Bilkis, 14
 Bishops, metropolitan, 62, 81, 85, 92-94, 114-16, 119, 157-8, 179-80, 183-4, 199, 204
 Blemmyes, 30, 85, 88
 Bruce, J., 10, 11, 18, 34, 114, 178, 185-4, 187-8, 195-5, 217, 250, 253
 Budge, Sir E. A. Wallis, 220, 255

- Byzantium, Byzantine, 52, 64, 85-84,
87-89, 124, 145, 149, 178
- Cairo, 8, 92-95, 116, 119, 148, 184, 199
- Carta das Novas*, 9
- Catholicism, Catholic, Catholics, 9, 126,
146, 148, 157-60, 178-9, 183, 202
- Cave-dwellers, 19
- Ceremonial customs, 14-15, 81, 85,
94-95, 147, 160, 188-90, 205, 207,
220-1, 224, 229-31
- Ceylon, 85
- China, 124
- Christianity, Christian(s), 7, 22-25,
30-32, 50, 58, 61-62, 64, 81-83,
85-89, 115, 115, 119-21, 124-5,
127, 147, 149, 151, 156, 159,
179-80, 183-4, 186, 195, 199,
205-7, 217-19, 222, 226, 228
- Chronicles, 10, 15, 86, 93, 114, 119,
128, 148-9, 154, 160, 181-2, 187,
189-91, 195, 195, 197, 207, 217
- Church, churches, 14, 52, 52, 54,
59, 61-62, 64, 81-83, 85-86, 88,
93-96, 113-14, 116, 118, 120, 122,
125, 128, 145-8, 151, 154, 157, 159,
179-80, 184, 187-90, 196, 198,
203-7, 217, 221-4
- Claudius (of Ethiopia), 145-9, 157
- Coinage, coins, 29, 58, 60-62, 83-84, 89
- Constantine, 50, 56
- Constantinople, 13, 85
- Conti-Rossini, C., 11, 17, 29, 150, 252,
253
- Copts, Coptic, 13, 85, 89, 92, 94-96,
113, 114, 116, 118-19, 121, 125,
157-60, 204, 207, 217, 219, 228
- Crusades, 7, 124-5
- Cyprus, 119
- d'Abbadie, Arnaud, 190, 196, 200, 219,
227, 230-2, 234
- da Gama, 9, 123, 145-8, 156
- Dahlak, 89, 91, 115, 120, 148
- Dakar, 121, 123, 127
- David (O.T.), 13, 15, 94, 219
- Dawaro, 115-16, 121, 125, 128, 148
- Debra-Berhan, 121, 180-1, 187,
189-90, 204, 226
- Debra-Damo, 51, 64, 85, 86, 93, 96,
113-14, 117, 145-6, 148, 149, 217,
223
- Debra-Egziabeher, 91, 114
- Debra-Libanos, 64, 85, 113-14, 116-18,
121, 126-8, 217, 223, 226
- Debra-Worg, 118
- de Covilham, Pedro, 8, 123-4, 126
- d'Héricourt, Rochet, 196, 230, 234
- Diodorus, 19, 50
- Dongola, 119, 201, 218
- Ebna-Hakim, 14, 17
- Egypt, Egyptian(s), 8, 11, 14, 16-21, 26,
28-29, 31, 50, 55, 81-83, 85, 88, 92,
94-95, 114-15, 118-19, 121-2, 124,
126, 157, 181, 196, 201, 204, 208,
217-18, 221
- Enderta, 26, 29, 52
- Entotto, 122, 186, 203
- Eratosthenes, 17, 19
- Eritrea, Eritrean, 11, 88, 181, 204,
223-4
- Erythraean Sea, 7, 17, 19, 28, 222
- Etchage, Etchagebet*, 114, 149
- Europe, European, 7-9, 21, 122, 124,
198-9, 201, 203, 207, 219, 223-7, 229
- Eustathius, 117, 179
- Ezana, 27, 30-31, 50, 53-54, 59, 61-62,
85, 151
- Falasha*, 120, 122, 151, 156, 222
- Fasiladas, 154, 159, 178-9, 186-190,
198, 219
- Fatajar, 115-16, 122, 126, 147-8
- Fekare-Iyasus*, 120, 194
- Fetha-Nagast*, 119, 160, 180
- France, French, 181-2, 188, 196, 202-3,
222
- Frumentius, 30, 62
- Fung, 156, 184
- Gabra-Maskal, 16, 22, 52-53, 55, 58,
61, 64, 81, 84
- Galla tribes, 147, 148-51, 154-6,
177-80, 182-4, 186, 192-5, 197,
201, 222, 225
- Geder, 15, 27, 49-50
- Gedur, 15, 50
- Geez, 23, 28, 30-31, 62, 82, 117-20,
149, 158-60, 222, 228
- Geography, 7-8, 10, 19-20, 26, 28, 52,
51, 53, 90, 122, 126, 186, 217, 222,
223-7
- Gobederah, 54
- Gojjam, 18, 90, 116, 118, 155-8, 183,
193-6, 201, 225
- Gondar, 10, 11, 116, 160, 178-87, 190,
193-6, 198, 201-2, 219, 220, 226
- Gran, 128, 145-7, 149, 151, 195, 206
- Great Britain, 11, 196, 199, 201-2

- Greece, Greeks, 16, 18-20, 23, 26, 28, 30, 57, 81-83, 85, 124, 207, 230
 Guna-guna, 64, 85
 Gunda-gundet, 149, 223
 Habashat, 21, 27, 29
 Hadya, 10, 94, 115-16, 123, 128, 150
 Haik, Lake, 91, 115, 114, 126, 145, 202, 218
 Haile-Malakot, 197, 201
 Haile-Selassie I, 49, 204, 232
 Ham, 64, 93, 115, 116-17, 217, 223
 Harar, 19, 21, 26, 115, 121, 127, 147-8, 150, 201, 203-4, 222
 Harris, Major W. C., 196, 234
 Hatahepaut, 17
 Helena (of Ethiopia), 8, 125-7, 183
 Herodotus, 17
 Himyarites, 28-30, 86
 Horemheb, 17
 Horus, 18
Iliad, 19
Imam, 123, 128, 146, 148-9, 178, 195
 India, Indian, 7-9, 14, 85, 124, 126, 178-9
 Inquisition, 10
 Islam, 8, 52, 83, 88-89, 92, 115-16, 125, 147-9, 177, 179, 195, 201
 Italy, Italians, 10, 126, 202, 204, 207, 223
 'Ifat, 92-93, 115-16, 120, 122, 155
 Jerusalem, 7-9, 13-15, 95, 113, 119, 122, 194, 206, 218
 Jesuit(s), 9, 157-8, 160, 178, 208
 Jews, Jewish, 62, 64, 85, 92, 116, 120-1, 222 (see also *Falasha*)
 Kabab (?Ankoher), 91
 Kaleb, 16, 22, 53-55, 58, 61, 83, 86-87
 Kasa, 196-7 (see also Theodore II)
Kebra-Nagast, 13-15, 114
 King-lists, 15, 94, 114
 King-serpent, 15, 17, 21
 Kohaito, 11, 51-52, 82
 Koran, 87
 Krencker, D., 58-60, 84, 234
Kuer'ata Re'su, 118, 160, 184
 Lasta, 26, 32, 90, 93, 95, 113-14, 128, 159, 180, 183, 190, 195, 208, 225
 League of Nations, 204
 Lehna-Dengel, 126, 127, 145, 149, 157, 207
 Legend, 7, 10, 13-17, 19-20, 50, 58, 81, 84, 86, 89, 91, 93, 114, 117
 Lej-Yasu, 203, 204
 Levites, 13-14
 Literature, theological, 9, 13-14, 16, 31, 58, 62, 82, 87, 89-91, 94, 114-15, 117, 119-22, 125, 149, 157, 159-60, 189, 203, 217, 222
 Littmann, E., 11, 58, 60, 234
 Magic and witchcraft, 121-2, 151, 155, 158, 195, 230
 Mahdi, 201-2
 Makalle, 27, 49, 146, 202, 223
 Makdala, 11, 198-9, 201, 220, 226
 Makeda, 14-16, 32
 Malak-Sagad, 151, 154-6 (see also Sarsa-Dengel)
 Manuscripts, miniatures, 117, 149, 187, 190, 198, 205, 207, 218-21, 223-4, 228
 Massawa, 9, 16, 25, 51, 89, 120, 122, 125-7, 148-9, 178, 201-2, 223
 Matara, 16, 26, 51, 55, 64
 Matthew the Armenian, 8-9, 126
 Mauro, Fra, 8, 122
 Mecca, 9, 87, 89, 125, 127
 Menelik I, 13-16, 22, 58, 206
 Menelik II, 51, 150, 201-4, 207, 252, 253
 Mentuhotep IV and V, 17
 Mentwab, 182-5, 187-90, 192-4, 220 (see also Berhan-Mogasa and Walatta Giyorgis)
 Menz, 91, 116, 225
 Meroe, 18-20, 28, 30, 50, 62
 Mesopotamia, 85
 Mohammed, 88
 Mohammed 'Ali, 196
 Monks, monasteries, monasticism, 7-10, 64-65, 82-83, 91-92, 94, 113-22, 126, 145, 147-9, 154-5, 158-9, 179, 190, 196, 205, 205, 208, 217-19, 223, 226
 Monophysite(s), 62, 87
 Moses, Tablet of, 13, 94, 205-6
 Moslem(s), 7-9, 52, 87-89, 92, 94-95, 115-16, 120-3, 125-8, 145-50, 155, 156, 159, 179, 182, 186, 198-9, 201, 203-4, 207, 218-19, 222-23, 225

- Mukarib*, 22, 27, 49
 Music, 81-85, 117, 186-97, 199, 221, 226
Na'akueto La'ah, 94, 115-14
Nagashi, 22-23, 27, 49, 50
Na'od, 124-6, 185
Napier, Sir Robert (later Lord), 11, 199
Nefas Mawakia, 55-57
Negus, 8, 89, 92, 201, 203-4
Nile, 11, 16, 28-30, 82, 85, 92, 116, 126, 196, 201, 203
Nubia, *Nubians*, 18, 29, 50, 88, 90, 119, 124, 218
Paez, Father, 157-8, 160
Pagans, *paganism*, 15, 17, 19, 21-22, 30, 52, 49, 52, 62, 64, 87, 95-96, 115, 118, 121, 148, 155, 159, 180, 182, 202, 222, 226
Papacy, *Pope*, 8, 118
Pepi II, 17, 55
Periplus of Erythraean Sea, 28, 50
Persia, *Persians*, 8, 85, 85-89, 124, 179
Poncet, 181, 188
Portugal, *Portuguese*, 8, 9, 123-7, 145-7, 149, 156-8, 179, 185, 187, 205, 207, 228
Prester John, 7, 9-10, 89, 124-5
Ptolemies, *Ptolemaic*, 19, 27, 28, 50
Punt, *Land of*, 17-19
Quara, 182-3, 192, 196
Quiha, 26, 32
Ramses III and IV, 18
Ras 'Ali I, 194, II, 195-6
Ras Goshu, 194, 196
Ras Haile, 195
Ras Makonnen, 203-4
Ras Mikael, 182, 184, 192-4, 197
Ras Tafari, 204 (see also *Haile Selassie I*)
Ras Ubye, 195-6, 200
Raydan, 20, 27, 29-30
Red Sea, 7, 9, 14, 16-17, 23, 27-29, 85, 87-88, 124, 148, 157, 186, 201
Roha, 94-96, 115
Rome, *Roman*, 8-10, 29-30, 86, 89, 119, 157-9, 190, 193, 229, 231
Saba, *Sabaeen*, 11, 15, 21-25, 26-30, 49, 52, 54, 61, 64, 82, 85, 222
Saints, 7, 64, 81-82, 117-19, 121, 157-8, 179, 206, 217, 219 (see also *Takla Haymanot*)
Salte period, 18, 50
Sarsa-Dengel, 149-51, 155, 179, 186, 206 (see also *Malak-Sagad*)
Sayfa-'Arad, 118, 120
Script(s), 19, 21, 25, 27, 30-31, 49, 52, 205, 219
Sculpture and rock-carving, 19, 49, 54, 57, 60-61, 85, 95-66
Semites, *Semitic*, 21
Sennaar, 118, 177, 179, 181
Serata Mangest, 14, 117
Seti I, 18
Sheba, *Queen of*, 10, 13-15, 52
Shoa, 7-8, 11, 14, 18, 90-95, 95, 113-14, 116-17, 122, 126, 128, 146, 154-5, 179-80, 183, 186, 192, 195, 197, 201-2, 204, 225-6
Solomon, 8, 10, 13-15, 114, 181, 197, 219
Somali, 115, 125, 127-8, 148, 150, 201, 222
Spain, *Spanish*, 8, 10, 89, 122
Stelae, 11, 16-19, 22, 27-28, 30, 52, 51-59, 83, 96, 225
Storia d'Etiopia, 17, 29, 232
Sudan, *Sudanese*, 11, 151, 156, 184, 186, 196, 201, 225
Suez Canal, 201
Susenyos, 155-60, 178, 186
Synazarium, 119
Synods, 179, 180
Syria, *Syrian(s)*, 26, 50, 81-83, 85, 207, 219
Takla-Haymanot (monk and saint), 91, 114, 117
Takla-Haymanot I, 182; *II*, 188-9, 193-4
Tana, Lake, 19-20, 28, 85, 91, 116-17, 122, 145, 147, 149, 151, 154, 157, 179-82, 186, 196, 217, 226
Tegulat, 117-18, 120, 186, 225
Theodore I, 119-20
Theodore II, 11, 178, 190, 192, 197, 198-201, 232 (see also *Kasa*)
Thrones, *votive*, 15, 53-54, 59, 94, 151, 205
Tigre, *Tigrean*, 10-11, 13-15, 17, 21-23, 26, 30, 52, 49, 51, 82, 90, 93, 116-17, 122, 145-6, 148-51, 154, 184, 192-3, 195, 197, 202, 208, 222-4, 230
Toconila, 51, 82
Tombs, 16, 19, 22, 52-58, 61
Trade, *merchandise*, 7, 17-19, 26, 28-29, 51, 60, 83, 85, 87-88, 91, 116, 118, 122, 126-7, 181, 186, 226

- Turkey, Turkish, Turks, 118, 125, 146-50, 154, 181, 184, 199, 201
- Tuthmosis III, 17
- Waggara, 120, 186
- Walashma Sultanate, 115, 121
- Walatta Giyorgis, 182-3 (see also Berhan-Mogasa and Mentwah)
- Wazeb I, 29-30; II, 83
- Wazera Esther, 187, 193
- Woldebba, 117, 194, 217, 223
- Wollo, 128, 192, 195, 197-8, 204, 225
- Yagbe'a Seyon, 115
- Yaqubi, 90-91
- Yasu the Great, 178, 180-2, 187-9
- Yasu II, 182-4, 187-90, 192, 208, 220
- Yeha, 11, 22, 26-27, 31, 51, 53-54, 61, 81-83, 85, 126
- Yekuno-Amlak, 113-15
- Yemen, Yemenite, 21, 25, 27, 31, 60, 64, 85, 87-88, 91, 148, 178-9, 225
- Yeshak, 119-20, 122-4
- Yoa, 184-5, 192-3
- Yohannes the Just, 178-80, 188, 221
- Yohannes, IV, 201-2
- Za-Dengei, 155-7
- Zagwe Dynasty, 93-94, 113-14, 192
- Zaila, 26, 91, 120, 124, 126-7, 201-2, 226
- Zara-Yaqob, 8, 120, 121, 123-4, 151
- Zawditu, 204
- Zion, 14, 15
- Zwai, Lake, 122, 148-9, 186

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